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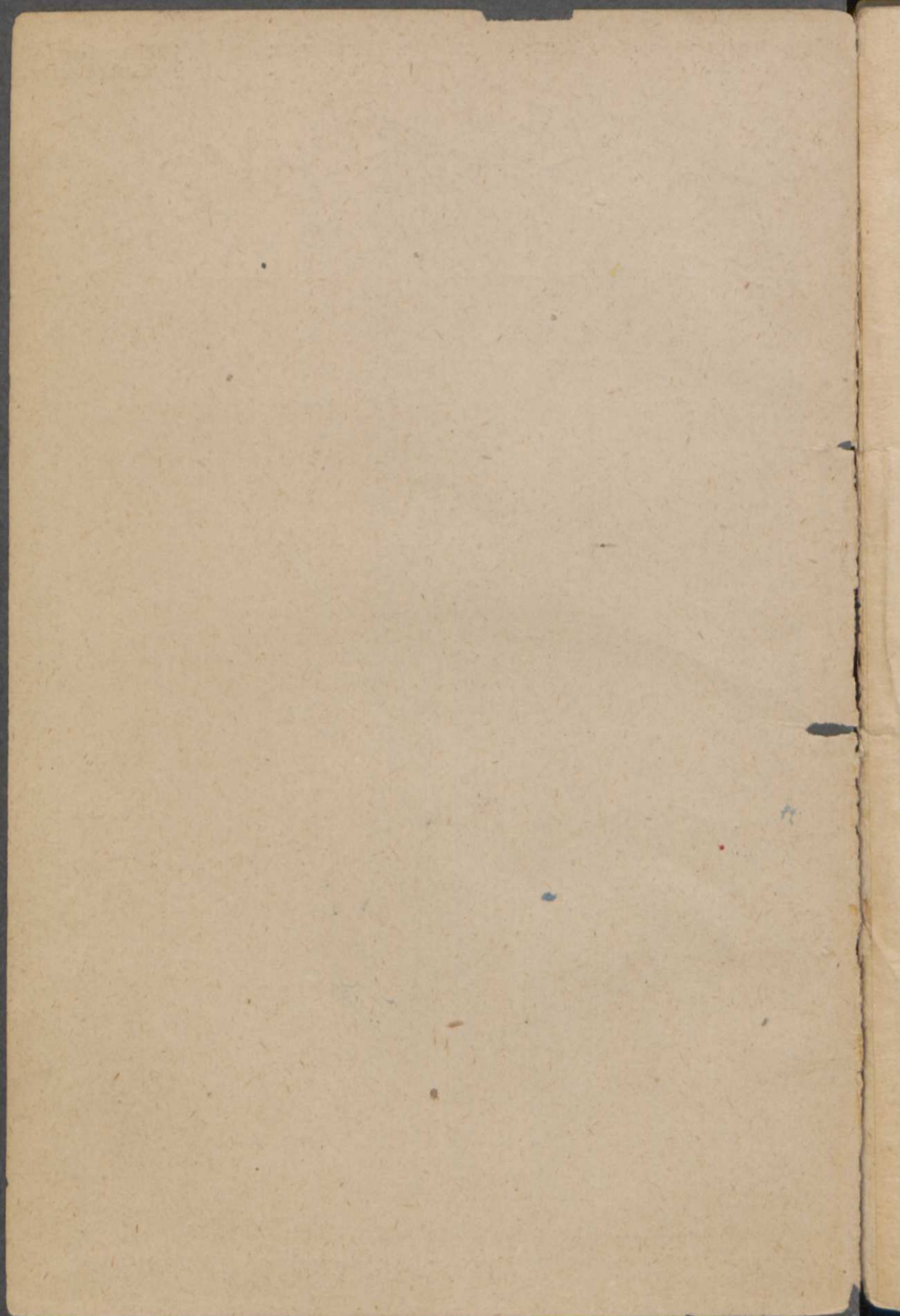
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POCKET NOVELS



On the Trail.





ON THE TRAIL:

OR,

TIM BUFTON, THE TRAPPER.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

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ON THE TRAIL.

CHAPTER I.

A SECRET OF THE NIGHT.

An experience of eighteen years as a member of the detective police force has given me a knowledge of crime and criminals such as is possessed by few of my brethren in the profession; and the success I have met with in working up difficult "cases," has earned for me a name such as few of those have attained who have been in the service far longer than I have.

Late one rainy night in April, I was sitting alone in my office in Blankton-street, straightening my accounts, which had been untouched for over six weeks, while I was engaged in New Orleans in trapping a forger who had been 'operating' in New York with a high hand for the last ten months. The dexterous penman and villain was at that moment meditating upon the way of the transgressor in one of the most secure cells of the Crescent City.

A great deal of labor was necessary to get my books in shape, and when the city clock boomed the hour of midnight, I was still absorbed in the work.

The rain had been falling unceasingly since morning until its desolate pattering upon the pavement without had come to seem like silence itself. Occasionally the dull tramp of a footstep was heard for a moment as it was opposite my door. My habits were such that, no matter how intently occupied with the matter in the hand, I could

never become insensible to what was occurring around me. I heard every footfall, noticed the slightest increase or diminution in the fall of rain, the sighing of the wind, and the faint distant call of "Fire!"

I suppose it was near one o'clock, when I raised my head, and with the knowledge that the footsteps which had passed my office at intervals of five minutes for the last hour and a half were those of the same person. Some one was slowly pacing back and forth, manifestly meditating upon him who was seated within, while the latter was as busily occupied in meditating upon him who was without.

I tipped back my chair, lit my cigar, and listened. Tramp, tramp, tramp, came that step out of the weary pattering of the rain, until directly opposite my door it paused for a moment, and then tramped onward until it blended with the unceasing rustling again.

"That for my sake!" I muttered, as I drew my revolver from my breast, and placed it in my trousers pocket, and then quietly unfastened the door. Placing my feet on the desk in true American style, I once more tipped the chair back, placed my hands in my pocket, and puffed away at my Havana.

Had I kept a record of the number of times that my life has been attempted by the gentlemen who considered themselves aggrieved at my actions, I have little doubt that it would not be credited by my readers. What claims I once possessed to good looks were effectually spoiled ten years since in Charleston, South Carolina, by a burglar, who sent a slug through both cheeks. I limp slightly from a deep gash received from one of the same persuasion in Baltimore, and there are sundry other scars, not worth the mentioning, mementoes of my varied and eventful life.

My impression, on the present occasion, was that the man who was so deliberately reconnoitering my door had no other object than my life. It is not a practice with me to boast, but I am safe in saying that this suspicion, amounting to a positive belief, did not occasion a single

additional pulse-beat. I, in common with my professional brethren, had become used to this thing long since.

The hesitation of him, whoever he might be, when opposite my door, showed that he was in doubt whether to enter or not. The lateness of the hour probably made him doubt whether I intended leaving the office before morning, and not willing to yield his prey, he was debating whether to enter and settle the question, or to wait some other opportune time.

As it was my wish to return to my family, I decided to tempt my friend within; and, to do this, I very vigorously cleared my throat just as he was by the door-step. He started and moved, but halted a few steps away, and then returned. My chair was behind the door when it opened—the exact position which I wished.

The next moment there was a sharp double rap, and cocking my revolver, I called out:

“Come in!”

A moment's fumbling at the lock, and then it slowly opened several inches. He was searching for me without success.

“Come in! come in! man alive, why do you stand outside?”

The door was now pushed open, and an extraordinarily tall and attenuated person stood before me. He was clad in oil-skin coat and pants, and a tarpaulin, with an appendage like a Havelock, that was joined beneath his chin, and concealed all his face except a pair of large gleaming eyes, and an immense moustache. I scrutinized him as closely as was possible, but he was a stranger to me. We had never met before.

He stood looking straight at me, with one hand upon the door and the other hanging by his side, as if he were calmly revolving in his mind the best method by which to annihilate me.

“Am I the man you wish to see?”

“Yes; I've a word to say to you.”

“Be so kind, then, as to shut the door; it is raining quite heavily. Will you take a seat?”

He never once took his eyes from me, but appeared to be looking directly through me at something that was crouching behind my chair. He shoved the door to, and then seated himself on the other side of my desk. Here he sat for a moment, still eyeing me with an intentness that made me suspect his soundness of mind.

Still watching him, I leisurely puffed away at my cigar. My visitor was evidently waiting for me to question him. I had resolved that he himself should state the object of this interview. Fully two minutes we sat surveying each other, so far as the fumes from my cigar would permit; then he broke silence in a deep, rich bass voice.

"You're the detective, ain't you?"

"Do you think I resemble one?"

"Humph! no, not much, but ye are one for all that."

"What reason have you for thinking so?"

"I don't think so; I *know* so. I'm too old to be fooled in that way. You needn't deny it."

"Have I attempted to do so?"

I could not avoid smiling at the earnest manner of my guest. It was as if he had laid a snare to catch me in a falsehood, and was exulting over his success.

"Yes; I think you have. Your name is Pelton, too?"

The manner in which this was uttered, said: "Deny it if you dare."

"You are certain of that, I make no doubt."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you please spell it for me?"

"P-e-i-t-o-n. Abram Pelton—that's your name."

"It is my duty to inform you that you are mistaken that is *not* my name."

The fierceness of his glare seemed to increase.

"What is it, then?"

"Be so kind as to favor me with yours, and then I will set you right upon the point that seems to occasion you so much trouble."

"Ho! ho!" he laughed, "no objection to that—Smith!"

"John Smith, I presume? I have heard of you before."

"No; Jake Smith."

"Ah! that's a little more definite. I have then to say that you were not very far out of the way regarding my name. It is not Pelton, but Pelham—Abram Pelham."

"No difference—I knowed you; yes I did. Did you ever see me before?"

"I can't say that I have. You have taken rather a strange time to introduce yourself."

"See here," said Mr. Smith, as if the thought had just struck him, sitting bolt upright in his chair, and glaring at me in such a manner that the gas jet was directly between his eyes; "I've got something to tell you."

"I believe you started out with that observation. As it is getting well into the night, I will be obliged to you if you will let me know what it is at once."

He now dropped his gaze to his hand, which was dallying upon the desk. Looking at the member, I saw that the second finger was gone, and he was employed in writing with his index finger. He was doing this absently, as a man will whittle or whistle when engaged in deep reverie, never dreaming that he was revealing his own identity by the action. One moment was sufficient for me to detect his given name. The sweep of his finger made a capital *E*, and the three letters that followed were *van*, making unquestionably the masculine name *Evan*. The next that followed was a *G*, but it required several minutes ere I could make out the remaining letters. Finally I succeeded, and discovered that the gentleman sitting before me was Evan Grimke. I followed the motion of that treacherous fore-finger several times, and then calmly lit another cigar. There was no mistake in the matter. I read it as plainly as if it were written in black and white before me, but I deemed it best for the present to withhold the knowledge I had gained.

Suddenly he raised his head, and fixed his keen, glittering eyes upon me.

"I'm running a great 'eal of risk in doing this."

"Then I'd advise you not to do it."

"Yes, I will!" he exclaimed with a sort of desperation, as he shoved his tarpaulin back from his broad brow, and folding his hands above his head, tipped his chair back, and once more centred his gaze upon me.

"You know the Walsing Bank up town, I s'pose?"

I signified that I did.

"Wal, that's going to be cracked to-night."

"How do you know it?"

"Never you mind how I know it. It's going to be done, and I should think that's enough."

"Why didn't you go to the police with this information?"

"'Cause I'm watched—I daresn't. They didn't think I had any idea of you—so I give 'em the slip. Have you a mind to go with me to the bank?"

"I don't know as I can, Mr. Grimké"—

"What the—"

"Tut, tut, no swearing. Never mind, Mr. Evan Grimke, how I obtained your name. Perhaps you not such a stranger as you imagine. I don't care about accompanying you. Good night."

This I judged to be the critical second, and held my revolver ready. Mr. Grimke waited a moment, as if undecided what to do. Finally, he opened the door and went out.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRANSGRESSION.

Whether Mr. Evan Grimke waited until I appeared on the outside or not, I have no means of knowing. I had reasons for believing that the information he had communicated to me was correct, and determined to do what I could to frustrate the intended robbery, provided it had not been already committed.

The appearance and manner of the man forbade that I should put any trust in his honesty. No doubt he was as deep in the plot as those whom he wished to betray. Some fancied injustice at their hands had doubtless determined him to "peach" on his companions, and it was my wish to make him believe that I did not intend to act on his information, in order that he might be thrown off his guard and entrapped at the same time with the others.

It so happened that I kept my account with the Walsing Bank, and Mr. Bonfield, the President, as well as Dowalton, the Cashier, were both friends of mine. The former was my brother-in-law, and our families were quite intimate, so that aside from my obvious duty in the matter, I had a personal interest in preventing the accomplishment of the great wrong. Mr. Dowalton, in years before, had been a "special," and on more than one occasion we had worked together in some scheme like the present. Perhaps Mr. Grimke knew this, and it was the principal reason he designated me as the one to receive his confession.

As I stepped out in the cool night air, and locked the door behind me, I saw the storm was abating. The city clock clanged the hour of two, and drawing my overcoat tightly around me, I hastened onward toward the residence of Mr. Bonfield. Were any raid intended upon the Walsing Bank, most probably it had already been accom-

plished. My only hope was that the burglars might still be secured, as it was not probable that they would leave the vicinity so long as they deemed themselves safe against interruption.

Fortunately Mr. Dowalton's residence was within a few doors of that of Mr. Bonfield, and it required but a few minutes from me to arouse both. The latter would have much preferred my procuring several policemen, but I assured him we could manage the matter alone. Bringing the keys with them, and each providing himself with a trusty revolver, the two followed me through a by-street that debouched into Broadway, within a dozen rods of the bank.

The rain by this time had entirely ceased, and out of the glare of the lamps, the darkness was so intense that we could have scarcely picked our way, had each of us not been perfectly familiar with it. There were very few pedestrians abroad beside the regular police, who seemed rather curious regarding our presence at this "witching hour." One of them stopped me, and it was not until I opened my bull's eye, and flashed it into my face, that he recognized me, and allowed us to pass. In the neighborhood of the bank I came upon another policeman, whose assistance I requested in a small piece of business.

"Have you noticed anything unusual in the neighborhood of the bank?" I asked.

"I have been here only since one o'clock, but I have had my suspicions up. About a half hour ago, when I was walking by, I heard somebody whisper to another, and caught the footstep of some one, as if he were walking on tiptoe. I've been by there a dozen times since and listened, but couldn't hear anything more."

"I think there are burglars at work, and if we are careful we may bag the whole lot of them."

We consulted together a few moments to determine our course of action. It was finally agreed that I was to take the keys and enter, the policeman following closely behind, while the two bank officers were to stand on the outside, and shoot whoever issued forth. I gave them both

this station, for I observed that they were excited and tremulous, and consequently could not be relied upon for the more delicate and dangerous duty. Mr. Dowalton had manifestly lost the "nerve" he possessed years before. Some one might whisk out ere we could prevent him, and they could therefore try their hand upon him.

Giving my parting admonition in a low voice, I inserted the key and cautiously unlocked the door. Instead of pushing it gradually back, I gave it a sudden shove, by which means I prevented its squeaking, and betraying our approach. Just within the door we paused and listened. All was darkness and silence.

The door of the vault containing the safe was still closed, and the burglars might be within that, busily at work. Telling the policeman to remain where he was, I went on tiptoe behind the counter and approached the iron door. As I did so, I caught the gleam of a light through a slight crack, and I knew at once that we had come upon them. They were there, and, as I have already remarked, it only remained for us to "bag" them.

They had not entered by the door, as that was undisturbed. They must therefore have come through a window, and had then forced open the door of the vault. It was an easy matter for me to close and fasten the massive door, and entomb them until we were ready to release them; but, before doing that, I wished to obtain a glimpse of the burglars while at their work.

Pulling the door back, I flashed the bull's eye into the vault. The picture that I there saw is photographed upon my memory forever. The safe door was open, and two men were kneeling before it. One had his side toward me and the other his back. The former was simply viewing the tempting wealth of the bank, while the other was gathering the glittering gold, shining silver, and crisp bank bills into a strong, capacious sack.

That momentary glimpse was sufficient to impress the features of the man upon my mind. If I encountered him twenty years from that date, I was sure I should recognize him. He was handsome beyond all question. A fine

Roman nose, dark curling hair, and ruddy, clean-shaven face, were the noticeable points that riveted my attention at first. As the light from my dark-lantern was thrown upon him, he turned his startled gaze toward me, and I observed his fine expressive eyes. His jaw fell, as a man's will sometimes do when affected by excessive terror, and I observed that he had fine even teeth, excepting the upper front, which had one missing.

"Surrender, or your lives shall be taken."

As quick as lightning, the man whose back was toward me dropped into the floor out of sight. The other instantly followed. The movement was so unexpected to me that when I discharged my revolver both had disappeared.

"Quick! out doors with you!" I shouted. "They have undermined, and we may catch them yet."

Headlong we rushed out doors, each receiving a shot from the revolvers of our friends on the outside, who, fortunately, were so excited, that they fired wide of the mark.

"Where is the termination of that piece of work?" asked the policeman, at a loss what course to pursue.

I confess I was somewhat bewildered, but I deemed it must come from across the street, and throwing the light of my lantern in that direction, I ran rapidly to the opposite side. Here I was confronted by the face of a large brick mansion, between which and the adjoining buildings there was but a small alley—proof positive that I was wrong.

All this time the policeman was running hither and yon, springing his rattle at intervals, and then listening for some sounds that might betray the whereabouts of the burglars. It required but a few moments for several "blue coats" to gather, who, quickly comprehending the difficulty, separated, and resorted to all means to intercept the robbers, and prevent their escape.

By this time some ten minutes had elapsed, sufficient to insure their safety. The birds had flown, and it was useless to attempt to search further. However, I allowed

them to continue the hunt, while I entered the bank with Bonfield and Dowalton, to ascertain the extent of the robbery.

Great as had been the surprise of the burglars at my entrance, they, or rather he who was holding the sack, was sharp enough to carry the contents away with him. It took but a few moments to see that over fifty thousand dollars had been abstracted—a haul sufficient to allow the operators to lie on their oars for awhile.

I confess I felt considerably chagrined at the ludicrous termination of our scheme for capturing the two burglars. I recalled an experience very similar to this, and I should have reflected upon this common means of entering banks. Had it occurred to me I should have winged both of the gentlemen, ere they could have dropped out of sight.

As soon as matters had become somewhat quieted, I prepared to descend and trace out the work of the robbers. Taking the lantern they had left behind I sank down about six feet, proving that if I had sprang forward, and fired down the opening, I could not have avoided wounding either one or both. Stooping, I found an excavation of sufficient size to admit my body without difficulty, and along this I commenced at once to grope my way.

There was little danger of encountering any human obstruction, but I proceeded very cautiously, frequently pausing and listening, but hearing nothing to excite suspicion. Twenty yards brought me to the surface again—this time directly beneath the floor of a large frame building, that a brief examination proved to be uninhabited. Upon emerging into the room, the whole thing was made plain. Here, in this house, the burglars had rendezvoused and began their work. The room and the one adjoining were piled up with the dirt that had been brought out of the mine, the basket in which it was carried lying directly by the opening through which I had just come.

I searched for some evidence or clue to the identity of the burglars, but there was nothing to be found; and making sure that there was no stray paper or tell-tale in-

strument, I again descended into the ground, and groped my way back to the bank.

Here I found the officers engaged in ascertaining the exact amount that had been taken. The cashier found it fifty eight thousand four hundred and eighty dollars. The safe had not been broken open but unlocked. The combination of letters and figures that defy the most ingenious, were not used by the cashier, but a complicated key, which he believed as safe as it was possible to make any human invention. The door was closed and the key applied. It was found to work as well as ever. On the floor lay the key which had been used by the burglars. It was a perfect *fac simile* in every respect, even to the combination of steel and brass used in their composition.

"Have you discovered no clue?" I asked.

"Here is something that I picked up on the floor," said Mr. Bonfield, handing me what appeared to be the torn edge of a letter. I glanced at it, and folded it away in my pocket-book.

"And here is something else that lay behind you," said the police officer, handing me a pen-knife, which I placed carefully away in my pocket. Both were precious relics, destined to assist in unravelling the strangest experience of my life

CHAPTER III.

AT SEA.

Before returning home, I gave the policemen and the bank officers an accurate description of the man that I had recognized in front of the safe, and instructed them to see that no means were left untried for his capture. This done, I made my way homeward, and entered the house just as it was growing light in the east.

I was considerably worn out and exhausted from the labors of the past week or two, and needed a thorough

rest, before undertaking any new "cases." I slept soundly until noon, when, as I had directed, I was awakened. My wife informed me that Mr. Bonfield and two other men had called to see me, she directing them to call again at two o'clock. These "two other men" I knew well enough were "brethren."

After partaking dinner and enjoying social communion with my family for some time the door bell rang, and the next moment Mr. Bonfield and two men entered. The latter I recognized as Hancock and Dubois, two of the best "specials" in New York. They had come to consult with me, as the bank president was determined that I should undertake the case, slight as were the chances of success. A reward of ten thousand dollars was to be announced in the evening and morning papers, and I was assured that one-half more should be mine, if I succeeded in ferreting out the culprits. The outgoing trains from all the depots were watched throughout the day, but no one answering the description of my man had been seen. The California steamer left the next day, and the European mail took its departure on Saturday. Arrangements had already been made for subjecting every passenger on each of these to the scrutiny of the officer.

At first, I was disposed to decline undertaking the matter. I had been away from home almost continually for the last ten months, and had resolved on a vacation, so to express it, of a week or two. My wife and children, during the former time, had necessarily obtained very little attention, and I was now anxious to make amends. Hancock and Dubois united their persuasions with those of the president, and finally I consented. The detectives told me to call on them whenever I wished assistance, and they took their departure with Mr. Bonfield.

Left alone, I acquainted my wife with my conclusion, who took it in the mild, pleasant way that she accepts every decision of mine, and then going to my room, I set about examining the articles I had brought from the bank with me. The first that I scrutinized was the knife. This was small and beautiful, and to my delight, I detected on

the ornamental slip of brass in the centre of the pearl handle the initials of some person—unquestionably the owner. There were three capital H's, cut almost as neatly as the engraver would have done it, from which I strongly suspected the owner was a man of education. There was no other clue, nor indeed could there be any expected.

With considerable interest I drew forth the slip of paper from my pocket-book. This proved to be the lower right-hand corner of a letter, and contained simply a portion of two words—the last three syllables of the word “respectfully,” and “don,” which was manifestly the termination of the man's name who wrote the letter. I turned the paper over and over, but there was nothing else upon it, and I saw that the grounds upon which I was to begin my work were now before me.

The next proceeding was to subject the writing to a minute examination. It was peculiar—sharp, angular and not very legible. The penman, whoever he might be, would find it a work of extreme difficulty to disguise his chirography. His characteristic style would show itself in every word. The only question now was whether the writer of this letter was the man who owned the knife. Of this there could be no means of determining; but, without any tangible reason, I suspected it was. It seemed to me as though “don” was a very natural termination for a name beginning with “H.”

Upon going into the streets in the afternoon, I found the newsboys on almost every corner, announcing the “Great Bank Robbery,” together with the reward of ten thousand dollars. I purchased a “Post,” and was standing on the steps of the Astor House, reading the startling account, when some one touched me on the shoulder, and looking up, I encountered the glowing face of Mr. Bonfield, President of the Walsing Bank.

“We've caught him!” was his delighted exclamation.

“Who?”

“Your man—the burglar.”

“Ah! that is indeed fortunate. How was it?”

"He was just taking the Hudson River cars when Hancock nabbed him. He tried to play the innocent, but it was no use."

"Where is he?"

"They have him around at the station house awaiting your arrival to identify him. You can accompany me?"

"Yes," I replied, folding up the paper and following him. "Has any of the money been recovered?"

"No; but I think there is little doubt but that we will lay hands upon it. You see the major portion is in bank bills, and any one will be very liable to detection if he attempts to use it."

"Had he no baggage with him?"

"Yes; a black valise, which Hancock searched."

"And the result?"

"Nothing, except some linen and under-garments. You see he wouldn't think of carrying the money away with him."

It was plain that Mr. Bonfield was determined that the man arrested on suspicion should be the burglar and no one else. I said little more until we arrived at the station-house, when the arrested man was pointed out to me. One glance sufficed to show that he was not the burglar, although he did truly bear a strong resemblance to him. He had the nose and the hair, and in addition a pair of natural, luxuriant side-whiskers, which could hardly be expected to have grown in the last few hours.

"Mr. Pelham," said he, "I trust you will speedily relieve me of this annoyance, as I am anxious to reach Albany to-night."

"It affords me pleasure to say that this man is innocent," said I. "He is one of the proprietors of the Levant House, where I have frequently met him."

The gentleman was thereupon released, and thanking me for my speedy arrival and prompt assistance, and accepting good-naturedly the apologies of the officials, he took his departure in the best of humor.

I left the station-house an hour later, and was just op-

posite Barnum's Museum (the old building), when some one called my name, and turning around, I met the red face of Dowalton, the Cashier, who was panting from the severe exertion he had undergone to overtake me.

"Well, what's the matter now?"

"We've got him this time, sure."

"I really hope so. Who arrested him?"

"A policeman at the Courtlandt Street Ferry. He had a ticket for Philadelphia."

"Was there any evidence found upon his person?"

"I can't say that there was, but there seems to be no doubt but that we have caught the bird at last. *He's confessed it!*" whispered Dowalton, with genuine exultation.

"Ah! that puts a new face upon the matter. That is better success than I anticipated."

"It is better than any of us dared hope. It makes a lucky thing for the policeman who arrested him. Ten thousand dollars doesn't grow on every bush."

We hastened rapidly to the station-house, as the announcement that the man had confessed the robbery made me quite anxious to see him. As I entered, and the individual was pointed out to me, I indulged in a laugh which was not understood by the triumphant policeman who was guarding his prey. The person was tall, lantern-jawed, with a sallow face and yellow hair, and was so intoxicated that he required assistance to maintain his perpendicular.

More for amusement than anything else, I requested an examination. He gave his name as Jarvis Jinks, and stated that he lived below Philadelphia, upon his farm of a thousand acres, but during the winter he made his home in the city. When asked whether he had been engaged in any robbery during the past night, he stated that he had robbed eleven city banks without the help of any other person, and, furthermore, he had their combined specie in his pantaloons pocket at that moment.

Being asked to produce it, he opened a capacious purse and slowly counted out four large coppers, which performance was greeted by a loud laugh by those around. As

It was evident that he was a miserable, verdant youth, he was simply locked up until he could recover his senses, while the discomfited policeman, who was now the butt of his companions, stole quietly out and was making his way back to the Courtlandt Street Ferry.

On the morrow the California steamer sailed, and acquainting the captain with my wishes, I stationed myself by the gangway, where I was afforded a view of each passenger as he came on board.

I recognized several of them as old offenders and acquaintances, but still failed to see my man among them. I did not forget that he might disguise himself so that to the superficial observer he would be an entirely different person, but I was sure I could penetrate any veil that he might use.

When the plank was withdrawn, I passed all through the steamer, scrutinizing the face of every man who bore the slightest resemblance to the one whom I was seeking. The result was as before.

I went through the same performance on Saturday, before the European steamer left the port, but there was no man who could have possibly been taken for the burglar. What I relied most upon was his eyes. I was sure I could detect them among a thousand. Besides, I had noticed that the man had very square shoulders, and was, beyond question, very muscular.

As a consequence, I scrutinized all square-shouldered men more closely than others, but, as I have already stated, without any success at all.

The search of the outgoing steamers and trains was maintained for several weeks, when the case was entrusted to my hands, and I was told to do what I could—that is, if I could do anything at all.

I believed, from the appearance of the young man whose face I had seen on the night of the robbery, that he was a gambler, who had been driven into this greater crime from heavy losses incurred at the gaming-table; and as the probabilities were that he was still in the city, the proper places

for me to search for him were those frequented by such characters.

The first week or so I expected to see nothing of him, as he would be sure to keep out of sight; but on the third week I began to entertain some slight hopes of coming upon him.

I need scarcely say that I was thoroughly disguised myself; as it would have been hardly safe for me to entrust my person in certain quarters that I often visited, had any of the inmates suspected my identity.

During all this search, I kept on the lookout for Mr. Grimke. He was the mine to explore, if he could only be found.

There was little doubt but that he could put me on the track that would lead me to the destination toward which I was so blindly groping.

CHAPTER IV.

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT.

About two months after the bank robbery, I was making my way home late one night, and was crossing the Park in front of the City Hall. When in about the centre of the area, a low whistle attracted my attention, and turning around I saw a tall figure, enshrouded in a long overcoat (although the night was quite warm) and a slouched hat, leaning against one of the trees. I looked at him a moment to see whether his signal was meant for me. He instantly repeated it, and jerked his head backwards as an invitation for me to approach. I did so, and immediately recognized Mr. Evan Grimke.

"Been looking for me, hain't you?"

"Yes; I've been anxious to come across you."

"Larn't anything about the robbery?"

"Nothing at all."

"Ho! ho! ho!" he laughed, his shoulders twitching upward at each exclamation, "You think I know'd something about it, don't ye?"

"I have not the least doubt that you do."

"You want to arrest me?"

"I have no proof against you, and I cannot therefore see what good would be accomplished by doing so."

"Just 'xactly what I was thinking. I see there's been ten thousand dollars reward offered. Ho! ho! they'd like to find it out."

"Yes; if you can give any information that will avail anything, you have a chance to make something."

"I s'pose all you want is to get started right—that is, you can foller up the thing yourself? You've done such work afore."

"Yes;" I answered, quite deliberately, for I saw he intended to make a revelation. "Yes, I only wish to be put on the trail."

He commenced humming a tune to himself, and tapping the toe of his boot with a rattan that he held in his fingers. Finally, he raised his head in that sudden jerking way that I had noticed on the first night of our acquaintance.

"What'll you give me if I put you on the track?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Pugh! won't do it."

"I will give you a thousand for simply imparting the information, assuring you that you will run no risk in doing so."

"That's the most you offer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then there's no use of talking," he replied, making as if to move away.

"All right; good evening."

I turned on my heel and walked a few steps, when he called to me. My bluff repulsion of his attempt to extort money had taken him by surprise.

"See here," said he, in an off-hand, familiar manner; "can't you do something decent? You give me a thousand dollars, and just pocket the other nine yourself. That is hardly the fair thing."

"I will agree that in case your information leads to the

recovery of the money, you shall have one-half the offered reward—five thousand dollars. If we simply catch the thief, but fail to get the money, I will double the amount I promised a moment ago; but, under any circumstances, I shall pay only a thousand dollars down, and I do not promise that unless I deem the information to be fully worth it."

While I was speaking, I observed that Evan Grimke kept looking around him, as if fearful of being seen by some person.

"Don't you feel safe?"

"I'll be hanged if I do."

"You remain here until I am out of sight, and then come to my office. I will await you there."

"That'll do," he said, motioning for me to leave. "I'll be there almost as soon as you will."

I crossed into Broadway, and looked back toward the Park. I cannot be certain, but I thought I saw Evan Grimke and a man still taller than himself in earnest conversation. I moved rapidly on, and when I reached my office in Blankton-street, the footsteps of my friend were close behind me. I had scarcely entered when he presented himself, and the next moment we two were locked together.

"Have you concluded to accept my offer?"

"I don't know; it seems like an imposition. You ought to give me fifteen hundred any way."

"Can't think of it."

He again lowered his head, and mused a moment, and then threw his chin up as before.

"'Spose I should give you the man's name, would you consider that worth a thousand dollars?"

"By no means; that could benefit me in no conceivable way, unless I knew where to look for him."

"'Spose I should tell you his name, and where he had gone, would that be enough to bring me the thousand dollars?"

"Yes; if you will do that, I will give you my check for the amount."

"Well, sir, the name of man who broke into the bank, and whose face you got a glimpse of on that night, is *Herdon*."

"His first name?"

"Herman."

"Has he a middle name?"

"I believe he has, although I can't give it. It begins with H, so that his full name is Herman H. Herndon."

I wrote the name on a piece of paper. This corresponded with the initials upon the knife-handle, and proved that the slip of paper in my possession contained the termination of his name, and was a fair specimen of his handwriting. This was quite an important step in the testimony, but the most important was yet to come.

"And now his whereabouts?"

"I can't tell precisely."

"As near as possible, then."

I held my pencil ready, as if I were taking down the figures in a simple sum in addition, but it would be difficult to express the interest I felt. It seemed as if he were purposely dallying with my feelings, but I maintained an appearance of perfect calmness. I was convinced that the man had given me the true name of the burglar, and was sure he intended to tell nothing but the simple truth. At length he repeated the one word:

"CALIFORNIA."

I started. That was the word that had been lingering in my thoughts for the last fortnight. Without being able to adduce any self-satisfying reason, I had indulged a strong suspicion that the man for whom we were searching was hundreds of miles away, rapidly nearing our Eldorado.

"Every steamer, and all the outgoing trains have been watched for days after the burglary, but nothing was seen of him."

"Because he didn't take the steamer."

"Did he then go on a sailing vessel?"

"No, sir; he took the overland route—starting the

very next morning after the job was done, and reaching St. Louis two days afterward.

"He must have been well disguised, then?"

"No, sir. If he had expected *you* would be on the lookout, he might have taken the pains to have hooked on a moustache or side-whiskers, but he wasn't afraid of the ordinary policeman."

"It's a pity that some of them are so obtuse. Where does the young man belong?"

Mr. Grimke looked up with a very knowing grin.

"I b'leve that doesn't come in the agreement."

"No." I laughed at the manner in which I had overreached myself. "You are sure, then, that he overtook the overland route?"

"He went from St. Louis to Independence, Missouri, where he took the final start about two weeks ago."

"So late as that. Why did he wait so long?"

"*Don't know*," was the answer, in the same significant manner as before. "'Spose he thought there was no need of hurrying, and he might as well stop on the way and enjoy his money before he went out among the prairies and mountains."

"Why did he not take a steamer to the Pacific coast?"

"He knew they would be watched a little *too close*," answered Mr. Grimke, with a leer that showed he was aware I had taken that special duty to myself.

"He displayed his prudence by avoiding them, for he would have assuredly been taken."

"That's exactly what he thought, as he knowed somebody besides the reg'lar p'lice would be there."

"Do you think he will aim for San Francisco or Sacramento City?"

"Hardly: them places will be apt to be troubled in the same way with the steamers, though maybe he'll go there after awhile."

"That certainly is very satisfactory information," I remarked, genuinely pleased at the knowledge I had obtain-

ed. The best thing for me to do will be to take the steamer that sails to-morrow."

"'Spose it would. I came across the plains some two years ago, and I can tell you it's mighty risky business. There be little too many Indians that are anxious for a man's scalp to make it pleasant. I think Herndon will find it as dangerous as if he had tried the steamer."

I had really gained all the information to which I was entitled by my agreement, but I still parleyed with my visitor in the hope of drawing something more from him, especially as he seemed in no hurry to take his departure.

"This young man must be quite skilled in the business," I remarked in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Seems he's got ahead of *you*."

"He must have been at such things before?"

"Can't say," he replied, with his characteristic impudence.

"If he gets himself off free with this, he can afford to retire on what he has made."

"Just 'xactly what I was thinking; and that reminds me that I have complied with my part of the bargain."

"You have, and it now remains for me to do my part. To whom shall I make the check payable?"

"To Jake Smith, or bearer."

"As that isn't your name, I will simply make it the bearer."

I filled out the order for a thousand dollars on the Walsing Bank; and Mr. Evan Grimke, after turning it over in his dirty fingers several times, as if he doubted its genuineness, remarked:

"Don't 'spose now that 'ere Walsing Bank was busted by that pile that was taken out?"

"Oh! no; it can stand several like it."

"*Your* money wasn't took, now, was it?"

"If you will call at my house to-morrow, I will give you the money itself, if you have any doubts regarding the check."

"Ho! ho! I guess it's all right."

And the next moment I was alone.

On the morrow I informed Mr. Bonfield that I had gained a clue to the mystery, and should probably be absent for several months. The same day I took the Western Express for St. Louis, having resolved to proceed to California by the overland route.

CHAPTER V.

TIM BUFTON—TRAPPER, HUNTER, GUIDE, ETC.

It may strike the reader as rather singular that I should put so much trust in Mr. Evan Grimke, who, as I have stated, I believed to be as great a scoundrel as the burglars that broke into the Walsing Bank. But my experience among the very worst classes of society has given me an extraordinary aptitude in reading men's motives; and, if I ever felt certain of anything, it was that this same Evan Grimke was telling me nothing but the strict truth.

His manner showed that he was actuated by revenge—a motive sufficient to make most men commit almost any deed. Then his keeping out of my sight for several weeks after the robbery, proved that he had done so from fear. I was convinced that, in some way or other, he was implicated in the burglary, and that if he had imparted his information immediately after, it would have recoiled upon himself. By waiting until certain that it would take several months for me to cage the flying bird, abundant opportunity was given him to secure his own safety. Knowing my expertness in tracking criminals, he understood that my information was amply sufficient, and would insure the revenge he so longingly coveted, and in this manner everything would terminate as he wished.

Had Grimke, in revealing the man's name, given one that did not correspond with the initials upon the knife, I

might have distrusted him. But this, together with his *manner*, satisfied me of his sincerity, and I have already shown how great was my trust in him, by undertaking a journey overland to California upon the information he had imparted to me.

As I was pretty confident of finding traces of Herndon in St. Louis, I did not attempt to take up the trail at the beginning of my journey. I first proceeded to Cincinnati, where I waited a day in order to search for signs of the fugitive. At the Burnet House, at which I stopped, I found nothing suspicious; but at the second hotel, the Spencer House, I found the whole name, "Herman H. Herndon, New Orleans." This showed that he had no suspicion that his name could afford a clue to any officer who might be on his track. Giving his residence as New Orleans was a precaution that any person might have adopted. I examined the handwriting, and found that it was identical with that of the slip of paper in my possession. Thus far, thus well.

At Cincinnati I took the steamer to Louisville. Here I failed to discover any traces of the fugitive, proving that he had followed the railroad to St. Louis. I immediately went by the western train to St. Louis, arriving just as night was closing in. I made quite a search that evening, but failed to strike the trail, and, not discouraged in the least, and embarking on the upward bound steamer, I was put off at the Independence landing on the afternoon of a clear day in May. Here the search was to begin.

Independence, Missouri, at the time of my visit, was a noted point for the congregation of trappers, hunters, and emigrants on their way across the plains. There were numbers of emigrants gathered here, as the gold fever just then was at its height. The trappers and hunters generally start for the mountains toward autumn, as the cold months are the time when the furs are most valuable.

My intention was to engage a guide to accompany me on my search to California, and to pay him enough to com-

mand his exclusive services. This could be easily done, as it was a season when they had little business on their hands, and were open to almost any sort of an engagement.

I had considerable faith in my own penetration—which fact, no doubt, the reader has discovered long since—and as I concluded to take the recommendation of no one, but select my man myself, on the day succeeding my arrival, I walked down toward the Missouri, which is a considerable distance from Independence, for the purpose of searching out the guide. The day being quite warm, I wandered away from the road, and took a seat in a sort of grove.

Here I sat, musing upon the expedition I had undertaken, and was falling into a reverie, which was the precursor of sleep, when I was startled by a sudden:

“Whoa, there, now! Whoa! I say.”

Turning my head, I saw a man seated on the ground, watching a small Indian pony that was grazing near him, and that seemed disposed to wander further away than his master was willing. The latter was reclining beneath a tree not more than a dozen yards from me, and must certainly have been aware of my proximity. One glance at him satisfied me that he was the person for whom I was searching. He was a splendid specimen of the physical man. He was rather short, but heavy and thick-set, with a compactness of frame that showed a terrible strength slumbering in his muscles. His face was broad, covered by a thin, straggling beard of grizzled gray, and several ridged scars were visible in different parts of it. I saw that, if approached skilfully, his heart could be reached. In short, he was a genuine trapper and hunter, one of those creatures of odd whims and fancies and caprice, as well satisfied without the society of his fellow-man as with it—one of those strange beings, a hero of a hundred perils, who was satisfied to lose his life in the mighty wilderness of the Far West without a single one suspecting or caring for his fate.

I scrutinized him as he sat there on the ground for full

ten minutes, then I arose to my feet and sauntered toward him.

"Rather a warm day, my friend," said I, halting a few steps in front of him.

If it was a warm day, the man seemed very indifferent about it, for he made no reply to my observation, except by a glance that expressed nothing.

"A fine animal there—an Indian pony, I should judge."

He offered not the least objection to my judging as I pleased. Drawing forth my cigar-case, I stepped forward and invited him to select one.

"Umph! get out, don't smoke them things," said he; "I uses the pipe. If you've a plug, I'll take a chew."

Fortunately I was provided with the article, although my weakness extends only to cigars of the Havana persuasion. Handing it to him, he wrenched off fully a third, and fumbled it away in his cheek with genuine zest, and then returned me the remainder.

"Keep it," said I, with a condescending wave of my hand. "I don't chew; that was given to me as a specimen of a lot that a man wished to sell in St. Louis, and I have no use for it."

"All right," said the man, leaning over on one side, in order that he might place it in the pocket on the other. "Tastes like the ginooine Virginy leaf. Take a seat, stranger."

That plug of tobacco had opened the way to the trapper's heart. I seated myself in a very indifferent manner, as though I was not particularly anxious to do so, and lighting a cigar, began a conversation with him.

"Is that an Indian pony?"

"Yas, sir, that hoss is a heap. I got him t'other side the Rocky Mountains, cl'ar up in Oregon, 'mong the Black-feet."

"He must have cost quite a sum?"

The trapper looked at me as though he didn't understand my meaning.

"Cost quite a sum? S'pose he'd cost you that."

"And why not *you*, as well as me?" I asked, considerably amused at his manner.

"S'pose you'd *bought* him?"

"I don't see how I could well have obtained possession of him otherwise."

"Umph! don't, eh? Wal, I knocked off the Blackfoot that was on him, and then mounted myself; that's the way I bought him."

"Was that exactly fair?" I proceeded, more for the attention of "drawing out" my new acquaintance, than with any idea of debating the morality of the question.

"S'pose not, when he'd been s'arching for my top-knot for over twenty-four hours; s'pose it war very wrong for me not to set still and let him raise my ha'r."

I could not avoid smiling at the earnest sarcasm of the hunter. He evidently was one of those men who had seen enough of the North American Indian to form his opinion regarding him, and he had no patience with those who attempted to gainsay his sentiments. Such men are very common in the West, and they cannot bear with us who undertake to demonstrate that we have learned something of the Indian character from reading Cooper and other fanciful writers.

"That puts a different face upon the matter. If the Indian was seeking your life, you were in duty bound to protect yourself."

"Sure of that now, be you?" said the hunter, much in the same manner that a teacher would have replied to a correction from the child. "My idees would have been to've wiped out the redskin any way, and then found out whether he war an enemy or not."

"Well, we won't dispute the matter."

"Whoa, there, Beauty!" he called to his horse, who was again wandering away. "Whoa, there, now?"

Then turning upon me:

"What's your handle, stranger?"

"You may call me Pelham," said I, deeming it not imprudent to reveal my real name to him. "May I be allowed to inquire yours?"

"Tim Bufton."

"A hunter and trapper, I presume."

"Wal, I've done considerable at that in my time, and I've sent a mighty lot of furs and peltries down to St. Louis, and I've had a heap of scrimmages with redskins. Yas, I'm hunter and trapper."

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNWRITTEN AGREEMENT.

When a man continues in one occupation until he reaches middle life, he is apt to become stereotyped. His mind runs in a groove, his thoughts, emotions, hopes and habits acquire a certain fixed circle in which they regularly revolve, and from which it is almost impossible to withdraw them. Tim Bufton had been a hunter and trapper for twenty-five years or more, and he never could be anything else. To-day, so far as the inner man was concerned, he was the same personage that he was twenty years ago. His frame had become hardened, his hair and beard partly frosted, and perhaps there was little more steadiness about him; but these were the only changes that a score of years could make.

It was enjoyment for me to study such a character as he. After spending the best years of my life in forced but intimate association with the most hardened hypocrites and wretches that disgrace our race, there was a relief in contemplating this honest, open, whole-souled fellow, to whom hypocrisy was unknown, and who in his great heart held a supreme scorn for all chicanery and meanness. The afternoon was before me, and before making any proposal to him, I resolved still more to draw him out. The tobacco had opened the way to his affections, and there was nothing to prevent.

"Do you love the life you lead?"

"I never done nothin' else; if I didn't like it, you don't s'pose I'd do it, do you?"

"Did you adopt the life from your own choice?"

"See hyar," said Buston, sitting bolt upright, and glaring at me in anger. "There be some things which it ain't best fur a stranger to ax."

"I crave your forgiveness," I answered. "It was done unknowingly."

"All right, but don't touch on it again."

"You never could resign yourself to living in the settled parts of the States—in some of our large cities, for instance?"

"Wagh! no, I tried that twenty years ago; but I couldn't get used to it. It made me sick; I couldn't sleep on thar beds, and there war sich a rumpus around me that as soon as I shet my eyes I was sure there war Injins somewhar about, and I ginerally scart the f lks by waking up with a yell, and slamming around afore they could stop me. I throwed a man out the winder one night that I was sure was a Blackfoot."

"How long did you continue the effort?"

"Only a week or two; I dressed for convenience, and when I went out in the street I was sure to have a lot of young 'uns follerin' me. I went into a bank one time with one of these bits of paper, that you can get a heap for—what do you call 'em?"

"Check, I presume."

"Wal, I took one of them 'ere things in a bank, and the man that give me the money axed me whar I come from. I told him I'd jes' greased a rainbow, and slid down on it. The others snickered at him, and he got red in the face, and axed me whar I larnt my manners from. I axed him if he wanted to see some of my manners, and when he said yas, I fetched him a swipe that made him turn flip-flaps over a big pile of books behind him. I pocketed my money and walked out, while the others yelled and the young chap was larnt not to be quite so sassy."

"You were abrupt with him."

"Yas; he never said nothin' to me arter that. I begun to git sick of the folks and things, and made a start for trapping grounds rather sooner nor I generally done, jes' on purpose to git away from the place."

"How do you like it in Independence?"

"Wal, I can stand it here for awhile, and sometimes I take a trip down to Saint Loney; but I never stay long; things don't suit me. My belief, sir," pursued the trapper, warming up into eloquence with his subject, "ar' that some folks is made fur the settlements, and some fur the peraries and mountains."

"You, I suppose, claim the prairies and mountains?"

"Yas, sir; they was built for such as me, and I never want to live to see the time when the Rockies gits levelled out."

"I doubt whether any human being will live to see that day."

"You folks out East git to making so many railroads, and tearing down things, that I s'pose the time'll come when the mountains 'll have to be flattened out."

"Little danger of that, Mr. Bufton."

"There! none of that—that handle doesn't belong hyer."

"As you please. I was going to ask, Bufton, how you would like to make a trip to the mountains at this present time."

"This ain't the time to hunt and trap; what ye talking about?"

"I wish to go there."

"Oh—ah!"

He turned his great, broad face upon me, and surveyed me from head to foot, as if to make sure of my identity.

"Goin' to Californy, I s'pose?"

"Yes; that is my destination. Can I not engage you to accompany me?"

He shook his head.

"Don't pay; I don't want none of your gold, 'cept what I gits fur furs and peltries."

"I am not going precisely for gold."

"Ye ain't; what under Heavens be ye going fur?"

"I'm hunting for a person. I have come all the way from New York to find him."

"Where is he?"

"He is on his way to California, if not already there, and I wish to engage a man to accompany me on the hunt."

"You've never been across the peraries, I s'pose?"

"No."

"Wal, you'll want some one to help you, 'cause there's a heap of h'ar liftin' done since the people have found out there's gold in Californy."

"Can I engage you?"

"I don't know; how long a time would you want me?"

"I am not certain; but suppose we call it six months."

"That'll take me into trappin' time."

"And what if it does? I will make it pay better than trapping or hunting."

"Dunno 'bout that," said Buston, rather unbelievably.

"A good winter's hunt is sometimes worth three or four hundred dollars."

"And I will give you a thousand to act as my guide and companion for six months."

The hunter again turned his broad face toward me.

"See hyar, Yorky, ef you want to make fun of a feller, you'd better travel. It ain't considered healthy to try to fool Tim Buston."

"I assure you I never was more in earnest in my life. If you doubt me, I will have a contract drawn up and signed."

"What do you want to make such a journey as that for?"

"I am in search of a burglar—"

"What's that?"

"A robber—a man that broke into a bank and robbed it of over fifty thousand dollars."

"Wagh! whar was that?"

"In the city of New York—that man came to Independence a month or two ago, and started for California."

I am searching for him. If you will put your services at my command for six months, I will pay you a thousand dollars."

"Ye're in arnest now, be you?"

"I will pay you three hundred in Independence, before we start, if you will signify your willingness to accompany me."

For a few moments the trapper said nothing. I knew by the manner in which he rolled the tobacco around in his mouth that he was meditating upon my offer. Finally he arose to his feet, walked to where his horse was cropping the grass, took him by the bridle, and led him back until he stood directly opposite me. He then leaned back against his animal, throwing one arm over his haunches and the other over his shoulders, and slinging one leg over his shoulders, so as to be "at ease," he said:

"Yorky, I don't know much about ye. I never sot eyes on ye afore to-day, but you looks as though you wan't trying to come any game over me. Ef you be," and here his manner showed unmistakeably that he was in earnest, "ef you try any of yer tricks on me, *you'll never see New York agin!* I'll go with you."

"Give me your hand on it then."

We grasped palms and the compact was sealed.

CHAPTER VII.

HO! FOR THE WEST.

My guide sat down beside me, and I explained at length my intentins. I gave him the particulars of the robbery, which are already familiar to the reader; told him that a munificent reward was offered for the apprehension of the burglar, and that for nearly twenty years it had been my specialty to hunt down criminals. When I stated the latter fact to him, he was very loth to believe me, never having heard that such a profession obtained among civilized

people. He seemed quite interested in my narration, and assured me that he believed we could strike the trail and follow it to a successful termination.

We made a supplementary agreement that, if at the end of six months I still wished his services, they were at my command for one hundred dollars a month—which I assured him was the salary Kit Carson received as a guide for Fremont during his first expedition.

"Now," said I, when we had finished, "how long have you been in Independence?"

"Less nor two weeks."

"Then, of course, you know nothing regarding this man for whom I am searching, as you have had no opportunity of learning."

"In course; when do you wish to start?"

"To-morrow, if we can be prepared. I must make some inquiry at first and learn something about the manner in which he travels; that is, whether he went alone or engaged a company, or joined an emigrant train."

"If he's jined an emigrant party, I don't see how ye can larn much about him; there won't nobody know nothin'."

"If he has gone alone, I shall be likely to find some one who will remember him."

"Yas, s'pose so."

"Or if he has done as I have—engaged a guide?"

"Yas, most likely."

"Then, if we can't hear anything at all, may we not conclude that he has accompanied a party of emigrants?"

It was amusing to see the look of wonder which the upper cast upon me. He comprehended my logic, and silently believed me to be one of the smartest living men—and I will not deny that his honest admiration gave me more satisfaction than some of the greatest compliments I had received from my brethren, and from those whom I had benefited in working up difficult cases to their advantage.

"You'll do, I reckon," said he. "I rather think you'll be able to float your sticks."

"If your animal is through grazing, suppose we go on up town?"

The burly trapper vaulted as lightly as a gymnast into the saddle, and going into the main road, we were soon on our way to Independence.

"Have you an animal?" he asked, when we had progressed some distance.

"No; I came by steamer, and didn't need a horse. I presume I can provide myself with one without going to any great distance."

"Yas; there be plenty of 'em in these parts. Does ye know anything about hoss-flesh?"

"Not a great deal."

"Wal, I've dealt some in the thing, and I reckon I can tell what a good critter is. So, s'pose you let me git one for you."

"I will be glad to do so; while I am searching for a trace of the fugitive, you may get me a complete outfit—horse, rifle, ammunition, everything that I want except revolvers, as I am furnished with a couple of the best of those."

"Have you got any luggage with you?"

"Nothing but a small valise, which I left at the hotel."

"You won't need a pack-horse, then; but it moughtn't be a bad thing if we had an extra hoss, in case one of ours gins out."

"Buy one, then; I leave all to you. You have a *carte blanche* to purchase what you think best."

"I reckon I wouldn't git a cart, as they're rather on-hand, and can't be used in some places."

I was rightly served for using such an expression to an uneducated man. Laughing at his natural mistake, I bade him good-bye for a few hours, while I returned to the hotel where I had left my valise. I found the clerk very gentlemanly, and he assisted me in every possible way. I went over his list of names for two months, backward and forward, scrutinizing each signature; but it contained

neither the name nor the handwriting of Herman Herndon.

"Have you examined all the lists?" he asked.

"No; this is the only place where I have instituted a search."

"You may find it in some of the other books. We have so many guests that it would be impossible for me to recollect faces. Still I should judge, if he were provided with funds, that this would be the hotel at which he would stop."

This conclusion, although rather egotistical, was natural, and shared by me, as the place was by far the best hotel in Independence, and Mr. Herndon was evidently the man to take the best care of himself, as he had evidenced in Cincinnati.

I made the round of Independence, using great care and patience, but learned nothing regarding the man, and finally returned to the first-mentioned place and stated my ill success.

"Do you ever have guests who do not record their names?"

"Oh! yes; when we are crowded we ain't so particular."

"That explains the matter; and as the other hotels do the same thing, I am shut off from obtaining any clue by this means."

"Sometimes I also write their names for them," added the clerk, as if anxious that I should know precisely the difficulty I had to encounter in this respect.

Seeing there was nothing to be gained here, I passed out from Independence proper to the grand camping grounds of the outward-bound emigrant trains. Here were several hundred persons collected, making ready for the perilous journey across the plains. Horses and oxen, men, women and children, cooking, smoking, quarrelling, swearing, laughing, all life and bustle, moving to and fro, bartering and buying, with a turmoil that was a perfect Babel. All races seemed represented; the cadaverous, yak-nosed Yankee; the careless, dashing adventurer

from the Middle States, the sallow, solemn-eyed, moody Southerner, the rollicking Irishman, the butterfly, volatile Frenchman, the burly, conceited Englishman, the sooty African, and even the almond-eyed Mongolian, were all here—converging from every part of the world toward the one great focus, California. Here and there, skirting around this sea of humanity, glided an American Indian—dirty, greasy, besotted—almost the inevitable consequence of contact with civilization.

As nearly all, if not all of these, were new arrivals, it was not to be expected that they could give me any information that I wished, and I therefore forbore to intrude. Had any possessed the desired knowledge, it was not probable that I could gain their attention for five minutes. Their minds were pre-occupied to the exclusion of everything else.

I stood contemplating the scene before me, when someone touched my shoulder, and looking around I saw a very tall individual, attired in the garb of a hunter, with a rifle over his shoulder. Little as I had seen of this class of people, I knew that he was a counterfeit. His manner and complexion proved that he was very recently from the East.

"I beg parding," said he, with an awkward bow, "but have you got the time anywhar about ye?"

I drew forth my watch and gave him the information. He appeared inclined to make my acquaintance, for, shifting his rifle to his other shoulder, he said:

"A purty smart heap of people out there."

"Several hundred, I should judge."

"Yas, more nor that," he added, for which remark I may state I did not exactly see the necessity.

"I should take you to be a stranger in these parts."

"I have never been as far West before. I see that you have not spent many years away from civilization."

"Just there is where you're mighty mistook, stranger. I've been backward and forward to the Rocky Mountains eleven times."

"Ah! you're quite a traveler."

"I reckon I is, though it's myself that says so; I have been tuk by the Injins seven times also, and each time got away myself."

"How long since you arrived from the West?"

"About six weeks—maybe more and maybe a little less."

I may as well state at this point that I knew the man before me was falsifying in nearly every word he uttered yet, as I had a little leisure on my hands, I concluded to quiz him.

"Did you return alone?"

"There was three of us hunters together; we'd been trappin' all winter, up near the headwaters of the Yallerstone, and we was bringing our furs and peltries back with us. I can tell you we had a heap."

"Did you encounter any persons when you were returning?"

"Nobody, when we started, 'cept Injins, bears and buf-falors. When we got down near home we began to get sight of white people."

"What were they mostly?"

"Emigrants: you see it isn't the time for hunters. There are plenty of the others on their way to California."

"Did you meet a handsome-looking man, Roman nose, dark curling hair, and a closely-shaven face? I suppose he must have had at least one man in his company."

"Good-looking, you say?"

"Decidedly so."

"Curly hair?"

"Yes."

"Had no side-whiskers, moustache or goatee?"

"Nothing of the kind, unless they were just beginning."

"Had another man with him?"

"I think so, although I cannot be certain on that point, there may have been several."

"Did he appear to be in a hurry like?"

"Very probably he did; he had good reason to get as far away as possible."

"Dressed pretty well?"

"He had the means to do so."

"Mounted on a good horse?"

"I should say he was."

"Let—me—think."

The man bent his head a moment, as if engaged in deep meditation, and then suddenly raised his head

"No; I hain't seen any such person."

"I didn't think you had, for I don't believe you have ever been as far West as the Kansas River, which isn't fifty miles from here."

"Do you mean to insult me, sir?"

"I have stated my belief; you may take it as you please."

"We, hunters, have a very expeditious way to settle such matters," forgetting the "hunter's style," which he had attempted at first. "Yes, sir, we don't allow such words to be thrown in our teeth."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll mighty soon show you;" and he drew forth a huge bowie-knife, and advanced toward me.

"You use that weapon, eh? I prefer this," I answered, producing one of my revolvers, and cocking it.

He stopped, amazed, and was debating whether to retreat, or to bluster still more, when he was startled by the exclamation:

"Now, you jes' leave as fast as yer know how, or I'll lam yer."

He attempted to turn his head, but the iron grip of Tim Bulton held the nape of the neck, and he was like a child in the hands of Dr. Winship.

"Gittin' sassy, be you, Long Legs; make tracks."

He released his hold, when the man attempted to expostulate.

"He insulted me, and"—

Thump came a tremendous kick that almost lifted him off his feet.

"I tell yer ter make tracks."

"What right had he"—

Thump, thump, and the terrific double kick sent him several feet on his way. He glanced furtively over his shoulder.

"I'll have satisfaction"—

Just then he saw the huge foot lifted again, and having already tasted enough, he instantly sprang away at the top of his speed. The momentum of the trapper's effort, however, lifted him entirely from his feet, and allowed him to fall upon his back. Quickly recovering himself, he returned to me.

"Yorky, yer hosses and traps are ready fur yer."

"Tell me, before we go, who that man is."

"He goes by the name of Long Legs, and has hung around Independence for the last ten years. He's afeard to go a day's travel out on the prairie, and tries to make everybody think he knows a sight. Didn't he try to stuff a lot down yer throat 'bout his being took by redskins?"

"Yes; he told me several stories, so absurd, that I didn't believe anything. Didn't you notice that he drew his knife on me?"

"Jes' to scare yer; he's the biggest coward this side of St. Louey. He'd 've run ef you'd only took a step toward him."

We made our way back to the town of Independence, where we staid over night. As there was no earthly use of delaying longer, we concluded at daybreak to strike out directly upon the plains in quest of the fugitive.

Before starting, I offered to advance my guide three hundred dollars; he refused, as the sale of his peltries had brought him in all he needed of ready money, and he was not afraid to trust me.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "ILLIMITABLE PRAIRIES."

I found that Buston had procured me a fiery Indian horse, long and clean limbed, and a small, stumpy animal, whose looks showed his plodding strength and endurance. Such articles as we should need he had also purchased—that is, they were all ready, except being paid for. This necessary suffix I added, and on a clear spring morning we turned our backs upon Independence, and our faces toward the far-off Rocky Mountains.

We rode the entire forenoon at a sweeping gallop, and spent the night at Wyandotte. The next day we made Fort Leavenworth, where I again instituted inquiries, and with a slight degree of success. An officer of the Fort had a faint recollection of a man offering him a cigar about a month or six weeks before, who corresponded with my description. The act in itself was of such a trivial nature that he paid little attention to the man, but he remembered that he was good-looking, and recalled that he was well-dressed. He had the impression that he had a moustache, but could not be positive either way upon that point. The occurrence took place within the Fort, and he did not notice who his companions were. He might have been alone, in an emigrant train, or with one or two comrades engaged to accompany him.

I was pretty positive that this man was Herman H. Herndon, and pressed forward with considerable confidence, feeling more assured than ever that I was upon the right track. Our pack-horse having a very slight load, was compelled to travel at a good gallop, although it was impossible for him to acquire anything like the speed of the other animals.

How a man will expand and grow when he gets into his element! It was a study to witness the trapper, Tim

Buiston. As we left the confines of civilization, and entered those wild solitudes that stretch for thousands of miles west of Mississippi, he seemed to inhale new life every hour we journeyed. The winds that came sweeping from the far-off mountains, he appeared to snuff as the war-horse snuffs the breeze of battle. All was natural. It was only on the plains that the genuine Tim Buiston was seen. As I picture his burly, muscular form; his broad, homely face, and the kindness of his great, noble heart manifesting itself in every action and word, he is one of the most pleasant pictures that lingers in my memory.

The first night from Fort Leavenworth we encamped upon the prairie. As it was not only this, but the first time I had ever done such a thing in my life, I remember every incident connected with it, even those of the most trivial character. Buiston selected a sort of hollow, near a clump of trees, through which ran a small stream of water. The herbage was quite luxuriant, and the horses, being picketed, made a good night of it. It was rather chilly, and we gathered brushwood and started a fire. We had brought some provisions with us, and upon these we made our supper. I had provided myself with a box of prime Havanas, and when we had concluded our meal I drew one forth. Buiston would not touch a cigar, but produced a clay pipe, well "colored," into which he packed with his big, blunt finger, some shavings from a plug, and then dexterously whisking a live coal upon the bowl, he commenced puffing away with the height of enjoyment.

The trapper was in the best of humor; I judged it to be caused mostly by the remunerative journey upon which he was engaged, and the pleasant circumstances that surrounded us. I was glad to see that I had made a favorable impression upon him, and I congratulated myself more than once upon the companion and guide I had secured for my travels. With the fire burning lazily at our feet, we lay back, one puffing his cigar, the other his pipe, nothing disturbing the stillness but the dull clump of the

horses' feet occasionally, and the noise made by nibbling the grass.

"I judge you have no fear of Indians?" I remarked, after we had smoked a few moments in silence.

"No; we ain't fur 'nough away from the Fort. Ten years ago, homsomever, it woul'd be mighty risky business to have squatted down here and kindle a fire: I was a settin' here with a feller once, jes' as I am with you, when crack, bang, and the feller went under afore he knowed what done it."

"And how did you escape?"

"Wal, you see, it war night, an' I jes dug out and made tracks. I can travel considerably, if I ain't very long-legged. But I come about as near gittin' throwed that time as I ever did since. They come on arter me yellin' like all mad, and when I dodged off and rolled down the hill, I war sartin that three of 'em seen me, but if they did they lost me right away agin."

"You have quite a varied experience among the Indians?"

"Wal, there be some that haven't seen as much, and there be some that have seen more."

"Very few of the latter, I should judge. Have you ever acted as guide or companion for any other party traveling West?"

"Yas; several times. The greatest thing I ever done, or helped to do, rather, war jest arter Fremont had got back from his first expedition. You see he went and had some books printed that told all about what he had done, and the sights he had seen. Wal, that set some people to thinking. They thought the other side the Rocky Mountains war about the greatest place there war in creation to make money.

"What won't people do fur money?" demanded Buf-ton, in an indignant strain of philosophy, "they'll break their necks and smash things generally, all for the sake of gitting money. Wal, sir, one day, when I war at Independence, with Jim O'Bannion, that'd jest come back from the beaver runs of the Yallerstone, three men came up to

us and offered us five hundred apiece to take 'em into Oregon. I s'pose they'd been reading them things that Fremont had printed, and they thought, maybe, they mought make five more dollars there than they could in New York.

"Wal, Jim and me haggled awhile, and finally agreed to go fur six hundred dollars apiece. The three men had enough money, it seemed to me, to make 'em powerful fools to go to Oregon to git more. (One of 'em was a man over fifty years old, and the other two war his sons—all smart enough lookin', but I jes' whispered to Jim that if all four ever got the other side the Rocky Mountains, he might be sartin they'd never all git back agin.

"They bought all the horses they could need, and they had a purty good heap of luggage, and we started out on a hot day in summer. I don't know how it happened, for it had never been so afore, and never has been since, that we didn't catch sight of hardly a red for over a month. Once in a while we'd see 'em off a ways on horses, but what I mean was that they didn't bother us any. We got cl'ar into the mountains into the Blackfoot country afore there seemed any need of our looking out fur redskins.

"Wal, sir, when we got among the mountains, them men begun to see what they had afore 'em. Howsomdever, we'd come so far that they kept pressing on, till it war all we could do to keep from freezing to death. The snow begun to fall, and it wan't long afore one of our horses died; two days arter the two other pack-horses went under, and all we had left was them that we war ridin' on. One of the young men wanted to go back when we come to this, and the other said he war willin' to do anything; but the old man shook his head, and we tried it agin.

"We dug ahead for two days, it snowin' nearly all the time, and the weather gettin' so all powerful cold that I came near gettin' throwed myself. On the third day we rest ~~ten~~ ~~under~~ ~~the~~ ~~rock~~, to git out of a wind that seemed to go through a feller's marrow bones. We war gittin'

purty hungry by this time, too, and we made up our minds to wait till the storm stopped.

"When we woke up in the morning we found the young feller that wanted to go back froze as hard as a stone. We buried him in the snow, and the old man didn't know whether to stop or go on, when Jim told him that if he wanted to travel further he'd have to do it alone, as he'd gone as fur into them mountains as he intended to. So we turned our backs onto 'em and started home agin.

"Wal, there!" exclaimed Bufton, shaking his head, "that war the greatest tramp this sinner ever undertook. It seemed it war snow everywhar—over head, under foot, in our eyes, all around—and then we couldn't get nothin' to eat. There warn't any game to be seen, and so I knocked over the hoss of the man that died, and we saved him till thar wan't anything but the bones left. It went purty hard for the gentlemen with us to do it, but they had their choice to do it or starve.

"Three days arter, the other fellow laid down in the path to die. We tried to coax him up, and the old man done everything he could, but he wouldn't budge, and I throwed him on my hoss and carried him till night, when he keeled over and give up.

"Yer oughter seen the old man go on then! He seen that his two sons' death had all come of his wantin' to git more money than he had. He wanted us to carry the body of his boy back with us, but that couldn't be thought of, and we put him in the snow, where, it may be, he is still froze up and presarved.

"The old man drooped arter that. He took his loss very much at heart, and I told Jim he'd never see the States agin. Sure enough, just as we got out of the mountains, he keeled over and went under, and we gave him a decent burial.

"Wal, Yorky, that war about the hardest time I ever had to reach the States. Me an' Jim 'xpected that we'd be throw'd every hour. We had the wolves on our track one night, an' if we hadn't got into a sort of a cave, we'd

been gobbled up, hosses and all. But we got back at last, arter bein' gone over four months."

"You received no pay?"

"Yes, the old man had a heap of money with him, and when he found he was goin' to be wiped out, he gin Jim and me our six hundred apiece, and about a thousand more, that we gin to a lawyer to send to his family in York, which must be a powerful big place, as it seems everybody comes from there."

Buiston was in quite a communicative mood, and, after smoking awhile in silence, he gave, without solicitation, the following interesting adventure.

CHAPTER IX.

A REMINISCENCE.

"It's about ten year sin' I's down in the neighborhood of the North Fork, nigh about to where it commences," said Buiston. "The Kioways, and thousands of other warmints were trampin' them parts, and a feller had to be wide awake to keep cl'ar of 'em. Howsumever, before I left 'em parts, I found there's summat else to be on the look out for besides Injins.

"One day I'd been ridin' my animal till him and me war both just about used up. We'd bin after bufflers all day, and besides killin' a couple, I had come onto a 'sign.' I found redskins war close, and jist as like as not had got on my trail. I kept a sharp lookout for them all the afternoon, but when it got dark I hadn't seen ary sight of 'em, and, in course, I s'posed they hadn't seen me.

"As no cover war in sight, I had to camp out on open perarie. This wa'nt the fust time I'd done it, and I didn't mind it. So, tellin' my hoss not to get too far away from me. I picked out a soft stone, and rollin' up in my blanket, went to sleep. It ain't often I dream, but that night I done a heap of it. I can't tell how long I'd bin

asleep, when I begun on a reg'lar dream that was 'nough to lift a man to his feet. It seemed as if the sky and the earth had turned into ice, and war coming toward each other. As I's between 'em, in course I had to git mashed. They kept coming nigher and nigher, kind of slow like, and I, all the time, hadn't a chance to git out of the way. I tried to move, but couldn't. I tried to yell, but it warn't no use; I couldn't even wriggle. On they kept comin' till they war within about a dozen feet, when they stopped, as if to give me a chance to git out of the way. I begun tryin' agin harder than ever, but I had to give it up. All at once they made a jump toward each other, and that minute I woke up, and sonnd I was layin' on my back in water."

Here Bufton, as story-tellers generally do, when they reach a critical point, paused. While I was debating whether he was going to conclude, for the present, with "To be continued," or go on, he relit his pipe, slightly changed his position, and resumed:

"Wal, as I's sayin', I woke up and found I war part under water. You may bet that I jumped to my feet and looked around me, and such a sight as I seen! Wal, there! I one time went up with a hunter along Lake Michigan, and I remember what a big pile of water it was. When I looked around me on that night, the fust thing I thought was that I was back there agin. There was a good moon, and you could see for near a mile, and just that fur you could see the bright lake of water stretching away, and the little swells of the perarie war sticking up like the backs of so many beavers. And there war old perarie grass, and sticks, and hides, floatin' about in a manner that war a caution.

" 'Tim Bufton,' says I, 'you're in a fix, and have got to do a right smart chance of swimmin' afore you get out of it.'

"And to make matters worse, the hoss wasn't to be seen. I looked all around, and called to him, but I s'pose he'd got scart when he'd seed the water comin', and had left several hours before.

"I found the water war risin' fast, and the little backs of 'arth kept gittin' smaller, till only two or three of the highest could be seen; and in half-an-hour there warn't nothin' you could see but the dirty, shinin' water. I floundered through a holler, and when I stood on the biggest swell, the water come up to my knees.

"I made up my mind, about this time, that if there was anything going to be done, it had got to be done mighty soon.

"I knowed that the country for eight or nine miles around war low, and covered with water, and ef I could get to the risin' ground, I'd find it all hard and dry. But jest thar was the trouble. Eight or nine miles are too long a stretch for a man with his clothes on, when he ain't sartin, too, whether he's goin' the right way or not. It's like he'll swim around and round, and come back to jest where he started, as you men will sometimes do when you undertake to travel in the woods. I looked all over, but I couldn't see a stick big 'nough to help me.

"By this time the water had got up to my waist, and I could feel it creepin' up my skin like so much ice. Findin' I couldn't stand it much longer, I tied my rifle over my back, and let my blanket sink under my feet, and stood and waited.

"At last the water got up to my shoulders, then up to my chin; and then the fust thing I knowed I war standing on nothin'. I took a few strokes, and then let my feet drop, but I went clean under without touchin' bottom, and I found I must swim or drown. The water wa so plaguey cold it sent the shiver all through me.

"Wal, I swum and swum, till I got so stiff that I lat ever on my back, and rested awhile. Little sticks of wood and grass kept hittin' my face, and once a tearin' big snake, all up in a knot, slipt right by me, just tippin' my nose as he went past.

"I floated awhile till I'd got rested, and then come over on my face agin, and went to paddlin'. If I'd only knowed which way to travel, I mought have felt a little encouraged; but it war rather provokin' to work all night

knowin' all the time that it warn't going to do you any good

"I'd paddled a half-hour when I felt my rifle slippin' off my back. I tried to catch it, but it slipped out and went to the bottom. I couldn't afford to lose it, so I went down with a dive, and, would you believe it, Yorky, I went down a dozen feet afore I got it. I tied it on as well as I could, and went to swimmin' agin.

"I now found I's gettin' weak, most powerful weak, and I felt so stiff that I knowed I couldn't hold out much longer. I grabbed at the sticks of wood, and put 'em under me, but they were so little they bobbed right up agin, and couldn't do me any good. I begun to think that the time had come for Tim Bufton to go under, though he hadn't been a trapper for a great many years. And, Yorky, I'm now goin' to tell you the quarest part of about the quarest adventure that, I reckon on, you ever heard on."

Before doing this, Bufton seemed to think it very important that he should replenish his pipe and fire, change his position, and puff away a few moments, to make sure that his tobacco was burning as it should. Finally he resumed:

"I got so tuckered out at last that I rolled over on my back, and made up my mind to stay so till somethin' turned up. The water were kind of still like, so that I knowed I wa'nt goin' down stream, and I s'posed I war jest as good in one place as another. I had laid over 'bout a half hour, I s'pose, when I heard a quare clickin' in the water. I turned over, but didn't see nothin' unnat'ral. You know, Yorky, when you're under water, I mean when your ears be under, you can hear a good ways; so, when I rolled back agin, I heard the same sound. It war jes' as if a thousand Injins war cockin' thar guns. It kept gittin' plainer and plainer till I knowed it war mighty close, and when I turned over agin I thought the water had all gone off, and the swells war stickin' up agin. But I soon seed they war movin', and what do you s'pose they war?"

"I have not the remotest idea."

“Why, it war a drove of bufflers, and they war comin’ toward me. Thinks I, ‘hyar’s a chance.’ I held up till they got near me, when two or three snorted and shied off; but there war so many that they kept comin’, and in a few minutes I was right among ’em. All I could see war big open noses, horns and staring eyes, and now and then the mane of some old bull, when he rose out the water.

“After I got among ’em they didn’t mind me much, though one of ’em gave me a powerful dig with his hoof. I felt around for awhile till I got hoid of a tail, and the way I war towed along war a caution. He kept snortin’ and turnin’ his head, no doubt thinkin’ he had the Old Boy in tow, but I hung on so tight, he concluded to take things quietly, and so he went ahead like a steamboat. I got along ‘swimmingly,’ and all I had to do war to hold on, and yell once in a while. and the buffler went along jes’ as if he was my hoss and I was a drivin’ him.

“I hung on a good while, till I found he war gittin’ tired, when I let go and grabbed another’s tail. This war a big bull, and he didn’t exactly like to have me hooked onto his tail, and when I nabbed him he turned around, and made a lunge at me; I dropped under, and come up and grabbed his tail agin. and givin’ a snort or two, he commenced towin’ me in fine style.

“The herd warn’t very large, and I soon seen the old bull war fallin’ in the rear. I didn’t seem to trouble him much only to make him go slower, and purty soon he war about the last.

“Wal, I s’pose I must have been towed a couple of hours, when I felt my feet touch bottom, and lettin’ both drag, I found they’d touch every swell. The water war then fallin’, and would go off as fast as it had come. Howsumever, I hung on till my knees bumped agin the ground, and I found the head bufflers had riz to their feet, and war shakin’ themselves. They had reached a risin’ ground, and as the water war gittin’ mighty low, there war only a few inches left; and going further, I found a place where it had all gone.

"I went on till I got ahead the bufflers. My clothes flapped about me, and the water *squished* up my back at every step I took. I was so cold that I had to keep walkin' to save myself from freezing to death. It seemed about a month afore mornin'; but at last the prairie began to lighten up, and the day come along close behind it. I then seed that the water war so much gone that I could take a tramp. There was about a thousand bufflers around thar, mopin' about, all so wet that they looked like blankets walkin' round on ramrods.

"As soon as I located the sun, I commenced makin' the tallest kind of tracks in the soft mud. I had to tramp through some water, but at last I got to the high ground, that first I spoke about. Nearly the first thing that I set eyes on war my hoss, that looked as though he'd been sitting up all night and expectin' me, and was quite anxious that I had staid away so long.

"It didn't take me long to mount the animal, and I struck a bee line for Westport, and hardly stopped till I reined up in front of the hotel, whar it took me summat less than a week to get dried."

Before we turned in for the night Bufton ascended the swell and looked around him to see whether there was any sign of danger. Far away to the west he caught the twinkle of a camp-fire, but judging it to belong to friends, it occasioned us no uneasiness, and we lay down and slumbered.

CHAPTER X.

A TASTE OF PRAIRIE LIFE.

In journeying to California, Tim Bufton avoided the regular "Overland Trail," for which proceeding he had several reasons. At this particular time this route was swarming with emigrants, among whom were numbers of the most inveterate thieves and scoundrels that ever afflicted a community. There was no telling what hour of

the night they might steal upon us—or, in vulgar parlance “make a raid”—and abstract our horses. While standing near the camping ground at Independence, I had recognized among those assembled there full a half dozen of the most notorious criminals of New York and Philadelphia. I therefore liked the trapper’s prudence in giving these gentlemen a wide berth. They were not agreeable neighbors, and we preferred that they should remain strangers to us.

Besides this, the Indians hovered like vultures around the outgoing trains. If an adventurer was tempted to wander off in search of an antelope or deer, the chances were very strong that he would never return. The utmost watchfulness was necessary to guard against the stampede of their animals, or a wholesale massacre of the emigrants themselves. The plains were full of roving bands of Indians, who were openly hostile and defiant, and who might well laugh to scorn any effort of the United States Government to reduce them to obedience or respect of its laws.

By diverging from the regular route, we took a course that was well known to my guide, and one by which we could advance with equal celerity toward our destination. The probabilities were that Herman H. Herndon was already within the confines of California, and we ran little chance, therefore, of overtaking him.

“A little chance,” I say, for indeed there was a slight chance of coming up with him. Had any misfortune befallen him—had he been captured, taken sick or robbed, he might still be within our reach. This possibility did not escape my attention, and it was the reason why, at regular intervals, we approached the vicinity of the overland trail.

“If the redskins have got that feller, I don’t see much use in follerin’ him,” remarked Buston, one day when we had camped for awhile in a grove of timber. “We might catch him, but how ’bout the money?”

“Not much chance, but we are as anxious to catch the

man as the money. If we got him, we should be pretty certain to reach some of it."

"S'pose we found out that he has been nabbed by some of the reds and carried off—what then?"

"I shall then do as you say—whatever advice you give I will follow it."

This concession to the trapper's wisdom plainly gratified him, and he whiffed harder than ever at his old black pipe. We halted but a short while, when we resumed our journey, swerving off to the southward so as to approach the vicinity of the immense wagon train, that may have been said at that time to have stretched clear across the western portion of our continent.

At night we were compelled to camp on the open prairie. By this time we were in a neighborhood where we had reason to fear Indians, and Bufton suggested that after we had cooked our supper, the fire be allowed to die out. I interposed no objection, for my dislike of the Indians was, perhaps, greater than his. I knew enough of them theoretically to make a more practical knowledge undesirable.

Darkness had hardly set in, when the trapper had called my attention to a light that was visible, apparently about a couple of miles ahead of us. Its flickering, star-like appearance, showed unmistakably that it was that of a camp-fire, although so far away that we could not catch a glimpse of the figures around it.

"I'm afeard there's gwine to be trouble there," remarked Bufton, as we stood surveying it. "We're in a country where Injins are mighty thick, and if they don't keep a powerful lookout there'll be some ha'r raising done in them parts to-night."

"We haven't seen anything of savages to-day."

"Plenty of 'sign' though."

"That may be a large emigrant train—strong enough to be secure against any force of Indians."

"Yas," replied the trapper, in a manner that showed he doubted it very much, "it may be, but there ain't many such trains that can afford to go to sleep without

having a good number that knows what's what standing on guard."

I did not exactly comprehend Bufton's apprehension regarding the safety of our neighbors. There were any number of emigrants abroad, and doubtless hundreds of camp fires were twinkling on the prairies at that moment. Why, therefore, this one should be in such danger, it was impossible for me to determine.

We ate our supper, picketed our animals, and then reclined upon the grass to indulge our pipe and cigar. I noticed the trapper took such a position so that he could survey the distant camp fire and at the same time keep his eye upon our horses.

The night was quite warm, and we lay for a long time conversing upon subjects uninteresting to the reader. It must have been well on toward midnight when Bufton remarked:

"If the imps do pitch in thar, it'll be purty soon."

"I am in hopes your fears will prove groundless—"

"Thar they be!"

Clearly and suddenly, on that still summer night, came the sharp crack of rifles, and the unmistakeable yells of assaulting Indians. Simultaneously with Bufton's exclamation, he sprang upon his pony and shot off like a thunderbolt toward the scene of conflict. I was so amazed that I had not time to interpose a word. It was as if the crack of the rifle had been the preconcerted signal for him to start off like mad and to break his neck by being thrown headland over his horse's ears.

It was no pleasant situation for me to be left entirely alone, with the absolute certainty that white and red men were engaged in mortal combat less than two miles distant. The contest, from the nature of the circumstances, could not be of long duration; the Indians would retire, and what would be their line of retreat? Would they pass anywhere near me? Would Tim Bufton find his way back again? Would he not be slain or captured? And in that event what prospect was there of my ever seeing Herman H. Herndon and the fifty odd thousand dollars

supposed to be in his possession? Would not the greatest thing that I could accomplish be my own safety, which at the most looked rather dubious just then?

Such were the questions that I propounded as I stood alone on that still summer night and listened to the sound of conflict. The tones of a man in ordinary conversation would have been audible for a mile, so quiet and motionless was the air. I could hear that peculiar whoop and screeching yell of the Indian, which is indescribable, but which, when once heard, can never be forgotten, and now and then what I supposed to be the shouts of white men. The latter, however, worked more silently than the former.

Having no means of judging of my own danger, I deemed it best to be prepared for flight or battle, as the case might be. Accordingly, I mounted my horse, and saw that my revolvers were in order. I sat with a light rein and listened.

After the lapse of fifteen or twenty minutes, the sounds of battle ceased almost entirely, and the same profound stillness as before settled over the prairie. Now came the imminent danger to me. The Indians were doubtless leaving the scene of warfare, and might be coming in a direct line toward me. There was an earthly chance for me in case of discovery, as, beyond question, they were better mounted, and could overtake me very speedily in case of attempted flight.

While I sat on my horse listening, my strained ears caught the sound of horses' feet galloping over the prairie. My first impression was that it was Bufon, returning, but I had good reason to fear it was different. Dismounting, I placed my ear to the ground and listened. It required but a moment for me to satisfy myself that there were fully a dozen horsemen rapidly approaching. I instantly remounted, and endeavored to catch the precise direction, in order that I might look to my own safety.

While debating, I caught the dim outlines of a horseman on my left, going at full speed. In an instant he had whisked by, and disappeared in the darkness. He was

immediately succeeded by another, then another, then three nearly abreast, and then several neck and neck, and finally one in the rear. Like meteors, for one moment visible, then swept by and were swallowed up in the darkness.

The Indians had gone, the danger was past.

I drew a breath of relief as the last one disappeared, and I knew that my presence had not been suspected. My concern was now for Tim Bufton. Had the attack been successful? How many scalps dangled from the girdles of those red demons that had just whisked by? Was that of the trapper, Tim Bufton, among them?

When I had waited a half hour I began to grow nervous. I had faced more imminent danger than this; but the circumstances in which I now found myself were novel and peculiar. It takes time for a man to become accustomed to a certain species of danger. I can say without boasting, that I have coolly faced death a score of times without flinching; but this was the first time I had ever been left alone at midnight on an open prairie, with wild Indians around me. Perhaps at the end of a few months I would not mind the thing as much as I did just then. But—

Sh! what's that? Another horseman?

While I strain my eyes, I suddenly catch sight of a huge form on a small horse riding toward me. While yet in doubt, it comes more plainly to view, and the next instant a well-known voice breaks out:

"I've done more ha'r raising to-night than you'll do in your lifetime."

And as he spoke, he held up in the faint light a cluster of the dreadful trophies of barbarous warfare.

CHAPTER XI.

STILL ONWARD.

The Indians, on that night, made as great mistake as did Tim Buston himself. The party they assaulted consisted of about fifty emigrants, including twenty men, among whom were several who had been on the plains before, and understood something of woodcraft. They knew that the savages—most probably the Arapahoes—had been on their trail for several days, only waiting for their opportunity to come down upon them like wolves upon the fold. This being the case, and it being evident that they were determined on an assault, the whites concluded it would be far better if the conflict should take place ere they entered the mountains, where there was danger of their being ambushed. Accordingly they laid their plans to entrap the Indians. The women and children were so disposed that they were beyond danger, while the men protected themselves from the bullets, and made it appear as though they were totally unsuspecting of danger. Their blankets were rolled up, and laid at a short distance from the fire, so as to resemble men in slumber, and then, vigilant and wakeful, they awaited the assault.

It came at the very time predicted by the mountaineers. The savages poured in a volley at the inanimate objects by the fire, and then rushed forward. Too late for themselves they found their mistake. They received a murderous volley in return, and the dreadful hand-to-hand conflict almost immediately began. While it was raging, Tim Buston burst in among them, and from the results I know he must have raged like an incarnate fury. Terribly repulsed, the surviving Indians speedily drew off, and retired more expeditiously than they came. The whites did

not lose a man, while the slaughter of the "red-skins" was terrific.

My companion was quite jubilant over the result.

"The tallest kind of a scrimmage I've been in for two years," he remarked. "Does a feller good to git into such a row; makes him feel a kind of loose and easy."

"It may have that effect on you, but I'd rather be teased, so long as practicable, from joining in such affairs."

"Some people have quare tastes," remarked the trapper, as if it were incomprehensible to him how I failed to appreciate the enjoyment of such a scene.

We lay down to slumber, but the excitement of the events that had just taken place drove all slumber from my eyelids. Bufton, however, in ten minutes was sound asleep. He said there was no danger of our being disturbed, and he showed his belief that such was the case by resigning himself to unconsciousness. I lay upon the ground for the remaining hours of the night as wide awake as I am this moment. Not once did I detect the slightest indication of danger; the horses quietly nibbled at the grass until they had their fill, when they, too, gave themselves up to rest. Glad, indeed, was I when the sky gave indications of daybreak.

A good breakfast, and a few miles' ride in the clear, bracing morning air, soon revived my spirits. In fact, it seemed, after I had been a few days upon the plains, that I had taken a new lease of life. The atmosphere was purer than in the States, and there was an expansion of soul as I looked around and gained for the first time some idea of the vastness of the country we call our own. Sometimes I felt almost ashamed to think I was hunting a criminal over this lovely expanse, that so sordid a motive—if such a term be allowable—led me forward.

There are moments in almost every one's experience when a sensation that is startling flashes over his soul. While standing upon the sea-shore, looking out upon the vast deep, the whole ocean with its thousands of miles in width, its hundreds of fathoms in depth—its islands, its

zones, capes and continents, storms and sunshine, will pass in all their sublimity before the mind. Their extent, and power and vastness will be fully realized—but it is only for an instant. We are lifted for a second, as it were, out of the body, and given a superhuman view of the scene, a portion of which is only visible to our senses.

So, in riding over the prairie, there would come moments when I have gasped, and my heart has beat faster at a sensation similar to the one to which I have just referred. The immense rolling prairie, its waterfalls, rivers and canons, its chasms, abysses and snow-crowned mountains; the thousands upon thousands of square miles of solitude; the innumerable herds of buffaloes and wild horses; the roving Indians and plodding emigrant trains—all these were realized—no other word will express my meaning—were fully realized.

I may now say that we were fairly out upon the broad prairies—away beyond civilization, where, under a kind Heaven, we had only ourselves to rely upon for protection. Bufton scanned the horizon for “sign,” as he termed it, communicating now and then the pleasant information that we were liable at any moment to be pounced upon by a party of redskins, who would have little respect for the motive that led me thither. We generally kept within a hundred miles of the “Trail,” so that if compelled, we could seek assistance from some emigrant train.

We were riding along one afternoon, when I observed that Bufton kept glancing to the southward, as though he had discovered something that was not very pleasant to him. Finally I inquired:

“What is it that seems to interest you so much, Bufton?”

“Sign agin.”

“Indians?”

“What else could it be?”

“How many are there?”

“Nigh unto a dozen—right south of us, too.”

"Will you please locate them for me?"

He pointed toward the spot where he saw them, and requested me to tell him how many I saw.

At first I was unable to see anything more than usual. The sky shut down on all sides, as if we were in the midst of the ocean. Away ahead, Pike's Peak loomed up in the sky, dim and hazy in the distance, like a faint blue cloud resting upon the horizon. Concentrating my gaze toward one particular point, I was finally able to distinguish a number of faint specks that seemed vibrating just on the line between heaven and earth. They were like stars seen at mid-day—very difficult to find, when lost; but when the vision was turned directly toward them, very plain to be seen. They had that peculiar flickering appearance that showed they were moving.

"See 'em?" asked Bufton.

"Yes; but I cannot understand how you can identify them at that distance. They may be whites."

"No maybe about it; they're reds every one of 'em!"

"Do you think they have seen us?"

"Guess not; but I ain't sartin—maybe they have."

"Are they traveling toward us?"

"They're trampin' along the same path; they've been est about that fur off fur the last three hours."

"Do you think they will trouble us?"

"Can't tell; they're in the worst place they could be; off there on our left. Ef we have to back out, there's no chance to get to the Trail and get help."

"Do you think that is necessary?"

"I don't like much to think we'll have to hunt up others to take care of us, and I wouldn't do it if you warn't with me."

"Is there no other chance of escape if they should approach?"

"Your hoss, thar, looks as if he war made to do some trampin', and I know Beauty can do it, for he's done the same thing more nor once afore."

"It seems that the prairie is unusually open and free from trees, is it not?"

"Dunno as it is; it's the natur of the thing in these parts. In a day or two we'll get into a better travelin' country. What I'd give the most fur this minute is the sight of timber."

I scanned the prairie in every direction to assist the trapper—an entirely useless proceeding, as his eyes were sure to detect it before mine. Turning my head toward the point where the Indians had been seen, I failed to discover them.

"Ah! they're gone!" I exclaimed.

"Look a little further ahead," he added; "they're in sight yet."

I did as told, and detected the specks again. I was sure, however, they were more faint, and, consequently, more distant from us. I remarked as much to the trapper, who stated that I was right.

"They're animals, and are on a gallop, and they're goin' arter something. They haven't seen us, an' we needn't fear seein' them very soon."

Fifteen minutes later Bufton announced that they had disappeared, and there was little if any probability of our ever seeing them again. Shortly after I raised my head, and directly in front of us, but several miles distant, I saw a small grove of trees. I was so surprised and gratified at this, that I scrutinized it several moments before I ventured to feel certain. Then I remarked, very nonchalantly:

"Yonder is the grove, Bufton, for which you have been wishing."

I saw the hunter smile, and knew at once that he had seen it long ago, and was only waiting to find out how long it would take me to make the discovery. He did not choose to inform me, however, of this fact, which was evident enough to me.

We directed our course toward the timber, which proved to consist of some forty or fifty trees, and to be on the banks of a small stream—a very fortunate circumstance—as both ourselves and our animals were both tired and thirsty.

We were several hundred yards distant, when Bufton suddenly reined up, with an exclamation of dismay :

“ ‘ Sign ’ agin, and the tallest kind.”

I scrutinized the wood, but could see nothing at all to cause this exclamation. We stood several moments in silence, and then I said :

“ What under Heaven alarms you, Bufton? I can see nothing among those trees to give cause for it.”

“ ‘ Cause you’re looking in the wrong place; look above the trees, in the sky.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAIL.

Directly above the trees, rising almost imperceptibly through their tops, was just visible a thin, perpendicular column of smoke, growing fainter as it progressed upward, until at the distance of twenty-five or thirty feet it mingled with and was dissolved by the clear atmosphere. This *prima facie* evidence of a camp-fire beneath was the “ tallest kind of sign,” that had attracted the attention of the trapper.

“ Some one thar, sartin,” said Bufton, in an undertone, as we stood contemplating the grove.

“ Indians, I guess.”

“ Dunno; oughter to know better nor that, ’less there be a big party of ’em.”

Admonishing me to keep my position until he returned, and not to advance nearer the grove until he should signal to me by the call of the whip-poor-will, the trapper dismounted and commenced approaching the cluster of trees. I watched his motions with interest. Instead of going directly toward them, he took a circuit, and came upon them from an entirely different quarter. In a moment he disappeared, and I anxiously awaited his return or signal.

Fully twenty minutes elapsed ere the low, tremulous

whistle, repeated several times, admonished me that "all was well."

I then rode gladly forward, and as there was no difficulty in making my way through the trees, I directed the horse's head toward the center of the grove. It required but a few moments for me to come upon a camp-fire, by which were seated Tim Buston and another hunter, smoking, and apparently on the best of terms.

"Yorky, this hyer be Sam Wadsworth," said he, introducing us in his characteristic manner. "Sam has done some tall huntin' and ha'r-raisin' in his time. Squat."

The man before me was tall and attenuated, with a cadaverous face and a thin, sharp nose, and a twitching nervousness of the eyes so frequently seen in those of his class. He had a deep, ponderous bass voice, and seemed to be of a sociable disposition. Extending me his hand, he bade me welcome. I sat down, smoked my cigar, and conversed on uninteresting subjects, and then gradually edged toward the subject of my thoughts.

"You are on your way to the beaver-runs of the Yellowstone?"

"Yas; that be so."

"Are you directly from the States?"

"No, I'm from Californy jes' now."

"Ah! hunting gold, I suppose?"

"No—I took a couple of men across—they was from 'way down East somewhar."

"Do you recall their names?"

"*One was Smith—Tom Smith—and the other was—let—me—see—was Hernley—no, Herndon—Herman Herndon!*"

"Them's jes' the ones we're huntin'," replied Buston.

"What yer huntin' them for?" demanded the hunter, in greater surprise than ever.

"One of 'em—that Herndon—has about fifty thousand dollars or thereabouts that Yorky has some claims on."

"Well, there!" exclaimed Wadsworth, "I's sure that chap had a lot of money in that little trunk he had with him. I heard it rattle more nor once, and he was so

mighty afeard on it. It seemed to hurt him if anybody else touched it, and he always slept with his head resting agin it. And then he paid me a thousand dollars to take him into California."

"Did you go all the way to San Francisco?"

"No; I got him into the State, and onto the right road and then turned 'round for trappin' grounds, where I'm goin' to stay till it comes time to set my traps."

"Ye see, Yorky, there's a tribe of friendly Injuns up in them parts, and Sam has his eye on a young squaw, and it's his idee to be as near her as he can and as long as he can."

"Very sensible, if he feels any admiration of the young lady."

"She's jes' the sweetest critter that walks," said Sam, with a sort of desperate doggedness, emitting a volume of tobacco smoke, and closing his eyes and shaking his head, as if to signify that it would not be safe for any one to dispute him on that point.

I gained little additional information by conversation with the hunter. Of course there could be no doubt now of being on the trail of Herndon. He was in California at this moment, and it only remained for Bufton and myself to push forward as rapidly as possible. As we were to encamp in the grove, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could. I simply lay back, with my cigar in my mouth, with my feet toward the fire, and fell to theorizing and speculating upon the "case." The two trappers, having far less interest in the matter, smoked, and laughed, and chatted over old times, recalling the names of many associates now dead, and recounting many of their own hair-breadth escapes. We partook of comparatively a light supper, and remained awake until a late hour in the night. Finally, the two wrapped their blankets around them and lay down and slept.

I remember looking at their two prostrate forms and asking myself whether they were acting the part of prudence in thus going to sleep at the same time; but reflecting that they knew more regarding the matter than I did,

my own head gradually drooped, and I joined them in the land of dreams.

I was awakened by a touch on the shoulder, and looking up, saw Bufton standing over me, while I caught a glimpse of Wadsworth gliding stealthily off in the darkness.

"Quick! there be Injins in the grove!"

I caught my rifle and joined him as we hurried away from the smouldering camp-fire.

"Cuss 'em, they've got our animals," muttered Bufton. "They might as well—"

With a frenzied exclamation, I saw the trapper grasp a shadowy form, and the two instantly fell to the ground in a deadly embrace. At the same instant I was thrown violently backward, and ere I could bring my revolvers into play I was secured in the vice-like grasp of two Indians and instantly disarmed. I struggled desperately, for had I been able to secure my six-shooters I should have made short work with the gentlemen who held me so rigidly; but it was all useless, and I was speedily compelled to the reluctant conclusion that I, who had so assiduously attempted to make a prisoner, was myself a prisoner.

I still had strong hopes that Bufton or Wadsworth would effect my rescue by making a diversion in my favor ere I was beyond hope. My rifle, knife and one revolver had been taken, but there remained another, which it was now my great object to reach. I feigned a hopeless acquiescence in my fate, and walked rapidly along under their persusion.

On the outer edge of the grove I wrenched my right arm from the grasp of the Indian who held it, and the next moment drew my revolver and cocked it. He probably suspected the danger, for he instantly dodged, as if to avoid the shot, but he was not quick enough to escape the laden messenger, that laid him dead on the sward.

The other savage drew his knife, with the intention of putting an end to my existence at once, but two rapid dis-

charges of the little weapon speedily placed him *hors du combat*, and I stood forth once more a free man.

I listened, but the sound of conflict had died out. Some distance away I could hear the tramp of horses' feet, which I took as evidence that the savages were fleeing with their booty.

The great point now was to find Bufton and Wadsworth. I judged they were still in the grove or the neighborhood, as they had no horses, and they could have no object in leaving after the Indians themselves had gone.

It was hardly safe to venture to call their names, and I therefore began a search. The grove, as I have already said, was comparatively small, and it could take but a short time to pass from one end to the other.

I moved cautiously, pausing now and then to listen, until I reached the camp-fire. A few embers still remained, so nearly expired that they afforded no light at all. A few feet away I fancied I detected a dark object upon the ground. Upon approaching closer and examining it, I found it to be the dead body of an Indian. As this was the spot where I had seen Bufton close in the deadly hug with a savage, there was little doubt but that he had disposed of his opponent and made good his own escape. A blanket lay upon the ground, and as there certainly was more prospect of my needing it than him to whom it belonged, I made no hesitation in appropriating it.

Moving on, I soon reached the upper end of the grove, and here, as well as the darkness would permit, I looked around me. There was a partial moon, and I could detect objects for some distance away. Finally centering my gaze toward one point, I was sure I saw a couple of persons standing close together. While the probabilities were that they were my friends, yet there was no certainty, and common sense would teach me to be cautious.

I was still looking toward them, and debating with myself the best course to pursue, when I received a crashing blow from behind, and was prostrated, senseless, to the earth.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

"A prisoner among savages! I, a detective, while 'working up my case,' had been captured by a party of American Indians! Herman H. Herndon might now repose in security. His pursuer was thrown most effectually off his trail.

In the night, I was stricken senseless by a blow from behind, and upon recovering, found that I was being placed upon the back of a horse. Four mounted Indians sat waiting, while two others had dismounted, and were lifting me rather carefully to my seat. Seeing I was recovering, they compelled me to finish the task they had begun.

All seven, myself included, being mounted, the horses were struck into a sweeping gallop, and, as near as I could judge, we took a direction due north. I rode between four of my captors, so that there was little opportunity of escape, had I purposed such a thing. But the Indians were all armed with a rifle, while I was entirely defenceless. I felt for my revolvers, but both were gone, and I should, if not overtaken during the first hundred yards, have been speedily brought to the earth by one of their unerring rifle shots.

I well recollect that the thoughts that most occupied my mind during these first few hours of my captivity were, how long it would be before I should again get on the track of Mr. Herndon, and what had become of Bufon and Wadsworth. I was tolerably certain that the two had taken care of themselves, although it was probable that one or both had been wounded.

It may well be said that my own situation should have occupied my mind. After awhile it did, exclusively.

What my captors intended doing with me was a matter for conjecture; but it was plain they meant either to kill me, or to hold me as a prisoner—either alternative was serious enough. I strongly inclined to the belief that I was to be adopted by the tribe, as I could see no reason why such pains should have been taken to secure me, when I could have been so easily slain.

The same rapid gait was continued until daylight. No once was a word exchanged, nor did they seem to glance at me. I examined my head, and found that I had been struck a severe blow, although there was no contusion of skin. The effect of the blow was a racking headache, that nearly set me crazy toward morning.

When we halted, it was in a deep hollow, surrounded by high rocks, and through which ran a sparkling stream of icy cold water. Here we dismounted, and preparations were made for breakfast. No objection was made to my bathing my forehead, and moving with considerable freedom, although more than one pair of dark, gleaming eyes were fixed upon my every movement. The fact that they were thus lenient predisposed me to believe that they did not meditate my life. Had it been otherwise, a more jealous watch would have been maintained over my every movement.

I recalled the many instances Buxton had given of persons being held by Indians, and I think that he was once a prisoner himself. From what I had learned regarding these singular beings, I judged that, when the opportunity offered, they would take captives—otherwise they slay their enemies. As it was morally impossible for them to capture the two trappers and myself, they had done the next best thing—captured me, and done their best to shoot them.

A fire was kindled, and a piece of half-cooked, bleeding meat—that I judged to be that of a buffalo—was given me. By this time I had nearly recovered from the effects of my blow, and was in better spirits than one would have supposed.

The Indians had still refrained from addressing me, and

paid no heed to the questions that I frequently put to them; whether this was from a want of knowledge of my tongue, or whether they adopted the civilized practice of refusing all conversation with them, I, of course, had no means of determining.

The sun was scarce above the horizon when we were under way again, proceeding at the same regular and rapid gait until the middle of the afternoon. We passed over a great deal of rolling prairie, and reached about noon a large tract of sparsely wooded country. Far away to the north, I could detect the white, snow-crowned peak of some monarch, that rose above the regular chain, whose summits I could occasionally discern. These were of a light, blueish color, and might well be mistaken for some vast forest.

When we halted, the Indians immediately threw themselves from their horses, and stretched upon the ground, one of their number, as before, taking upon himself the duty of attending to the preparation of food for the rest.

While thus engaged, I wandered a few yards away and lay down upon the grass. I still retained my pencil, note-book, money, watch and valuables about me. In fact, the Indians had only taken my weapons, leaving the rest of my possessions intact. For the purpose of whiling away a half-hour or so, I drew out my note-book, and began transcribing the experiences of the last few days.

It was while I was thus engaged that I was startled by a light footfall behind me, and turning my head, I encountered a picture that filled me with absolute amazement. A young white woman, beautifully and elegantly dressed, without a particle of Indian finery around her, was walking slowly toward me, and leading a magnificent black pony. She smiled as she saw my alarmed look.

"Good Heavens! young lady!" I exclaimed. "Do you know where you are going? There are Indians out there? Mount your horse, and flee at once."

Instead of obeying my frenzied injunction, she merely smiled and extended her hand.

"Don't be alarmed; they are my friends. They will not harm me."

"I do not understand," I added, as I arose and took her hand. "I should say that you belonged to some gay party of equestrians, and had wandered away from them."

"No doubt; you would hardly believe that I had spent six years among these savages."

"Impossible!"

"Nay, I speak the truth. I should add, that during that time I have frequently visited the East, and gone as far as Philadelphia and New York."

"Some beautiful young chief's better half?" I laughed.

"Indeed I am not," she retorted, with considerable feeling.

"May I ask if you are a willing resident among these people? Is your stay voluntary upon your part?"

"I was not at first, *but it is so now.*"

During the utterance of the last few words I noticed a singular change in her manner. Instead of the vivaciousness that characterized her at first, there was an air of the deepest melancholy. Young and beautiful as she was, it was certain to me that some great life-sorrow weighed her down. Her dream of life had been overclouded at the very beginning.

It was plain to me that she was a person of considerable influence among the Indians, for when one of them approached to where we were conversing, as if to interrupt us, she authoritatively waved him back, and he obeyed without the least demur.

If my reader has any inclination to become romantic, he is requested, at this point, to bear in mind our respective situations in life. She was young and handsome, and beyond question, there was a delightful mystery about her; but *myself!* very nearly fifty years of age, homely, and a married man, with children. Although compelled by my business to spend a great deal of my time away from home, I can say with truth that there are few more de-

voted husbands than myself. Consequently, it must be understood that, if I am compelled to refer to any romantic passion, it can have no possible relation to myself.

I experienced a natural curiosity in the lady before me. From her physiognomy, I judged her to be a woman of intelligence and refinement, and the wonder was therefore greater that she should spend her life among these North American savages.

Still I had no right to be impertinent.

"You, I suppose, are not a willing companion of these red men?" she asked, with a smile and an attempt to return to her first buoyancy.

"They are the last I should ever select for their society. I never had much admiration of them, and would always prefer that they should keep their distance."

"You wish to leave them?" she asked, lowering her voice.

"I do."

"You will have to remain some time with them; but, if God wills, I will help you away."

I bowed my sincere thanks.

"I will trust you; there is great need of my being in California at once; and be assured that what assistance you are pleased to give will be gratefully remembered through life."

"I have helped others before."

"Do you incur no risk in doing it?"

"Not much; none of them would harm me, as I am a woman; and I have endeavored to teach them the principles of our blessed Savior's religion."

I looked at her with greater respect than ever.

"You belong to the family of a missionary, then?"

She again smiled.

"There is no one living that I could claim as a part of my own family. I have toiled for a few years among these poor people, but it has been alone."

"And do you expect to remain and die here?"

Again that sad, distressful look clouded her face and I saw my grievous error.

"I crave forgiveness for paining you. As I am totally unacquainted with any of the particulars of your life, I cannot be too careful of what I say."

She remained with her head bowed for a few moments, and then looked up.

"Perhaps it is well that we end our conversation. They are observing us. Before doing so, will you give me your name?"

"Abram Pelham."

"And mine is Eurena Duranne."

Somewhere, years before, I had heard that name. I repeated it over and over. I was sure of it, but where or when it was impossible to tell. At length it struck me that it was in the city of New York, but beyond that I was lost. I lay awake until midnight, trying to trace back the shadowy thread; but at a certain point it was broken, and no effort of Memory could weave the severed skeins together again.

CHAPTER XIV.

FREE AGAIN.

As I sit to-day and look back over my long and eventful life, I cannot help reverting to the strangest experience of all—my following the trail of Herman H. Herndon across the prairies, my captivity, the clearing up of the mystery of Eurena Duranne, and the wonderful web of circumstances into which they and myself became woven, before all was made clear.

I was a captive among the Crow Indians exactly fifty days. I never once lost my reckoning, and am therefore certain of the precise time. During this period I was treated with comparative kindness; and when I finally turned my back upon the tribe, among whom I had re-

mained so long. I cherished no ill-feeling toward a single member.

Eurena Duranne was the daughter of a missionary who had been killed some years before, and from this probably derived the great influence she exerted over the savages. Those with whom she lived belonged to the Crow tribe; they numbered something over three hundred, and were a "split" from the original tribe, which number was in the neighborhood of four thousand. Among this smaller community were about eighty warriors and old men, fully one-half of whom were Christians. As a certain result, their influence over the others was great in a moral point of view. They went on their warlike excursions, but they never scalped nor tortured their prisoners, and conducted their warfare in a more civilized manner than those of their race generally did.

Eurena Duranne passed like a ministering angel among those rude sons of the wood. She was at home in their lodges and was treated with respect and veneration by all. Some years before, an Indian who had used rudeness toward her was shot dead. Her precept and example did incalculable good in quelling their vices and passions, and in keeping them in the path laid out by the great Friend of all men.

Upon coming among the tribe, I was conducted to a lodge where dwelt an old woman and her two sons, both as splendid specimens, physically, of men that I ever saw. A close surveillance was kept over my actions, and I was not allowed to pass beyond the limits of the village. I was furnished regularly with good and sufficient food, and none of my property was taken from me. I was disappointed and somewhat aggrieved that Miss Duranne did not call upon me more frequently. She visited me the first day, and told me to be hopeful, as the day of deliverance was probably close at hand.

Respected and feared as she was, I believed she might have secured my release at any time, (although perhaps I had no right to ask her to weaken her influence by so doing,) or she might have called on me, and appeared on

more friendly terms. I saw her nearly every day, but exchanged words with her on only two occasions during the first week. On the second week it was about the same, and when, the third week, I came to the conclusion that, if I effected my escape at all, it must be, under Heaven, through my own exertions.

The most of my time was spent in forming plans for escape. There were many times when I could have made my way out of the village, but as I had no horse I should have been immediately tracked and overtaken, or, even if I succeeded in eluding my enemies, I should have been helpless upon the great prairies.

I was lying in my lodge late one night, trying in vain to court sleep. I was in the back part, while the old woman and her two sons were between me and the door. The night was oppressively warm, and from where I lay I could look out the door and see the blue sky beyond.

I had been in this peculiar, restless condition some time, when a figure appeared without the least noise at the opening, and remaining stationary for a moment, passed away like a shadow. The glimpse that I had had convinced me that it was Eurena Duranne, and I believed it was I that she wished to see. I instantly arose and commenced making my way cautiously toward the door. In doing so I aroused the old woman, who was considerably startled. I made a trifling excuse, and, after muttering something to herself, she allowed me to pass out.

On the outside of the lodge I looked around, but failed to see any one. I gave a low cough to attract attention. Almost immediately Miss Duranne appeared at my side. With a cautious "sh!" she signified me to follow her, and I did so until we were outside the village.

"No doubt you have been offended at my remaining away so long; but it was for the best. There is no suspicion, and you are now free to leave this place. I have provided a horse, and I can only tell you to make all speed with him, as you will be pursued. Take a southerly direction, and God's blessing go with you."

"But, Miss Duranne," said I, taking her hand, "how

can I ever thank you for this kindness? I cannot; you can appreciate my gratitude. But I would know more regarding you before I go. Have you no desire to leave this place? If you have no friends or acquaintances, return to my home, and become a member of my family."

"It cannot be. I have friends, but I prefer to remain here."

"This is a love affair," said I, deeming it best to probe the wound to the bottom at once. "I ask nothing that you do not choose to give, but I have a feeling that, in some way or other, I may be of benefit to you."

She remained silent a moment, and then answered:

"It cannot be; you can afford me no help. I look above for help."

"Are you certain I can be of no use to you?"

"Yes," she replied, again hesitating. "Let us say no more."

Some singular impulse, for which I cannot account, prompted me to mention the name of Herndon to her. Several times it was on my tongue, but I refrained.

"I must, then, bid you good-bye," said I, "and in doing so, I do not experience the sadness that I expected. I think it must be because I feel we shall soon meet again."

"I trust we shall. You are now about to enter upon a dangerous undertaking. There is One who can shield and protect you, and, Mr. Pelham, do not—oh! do not forget to call on Him, whether in the hour of need or when all goes well with you."

She turned and walked toward the village. I watched her form until it blended with the darkness and disappeared.

Sensible now that the time for action had arrived, I immediately mounted my horse and began picking my way through the wood and undergrowth. It was impossible to proceed at a faster gait than a walk, and I could not avoid a feeling of impatience at the tardiness with which I progressed. In the course of an hour or two I struck into

a sort of open rolling prairie, and immediately put my horse into a rapid canter.

It was while riding along in this manner that I suddenly reined up my horse with a feeling of dismay. I had just become conscious that I had not a single fire-arm in my possession. I hurriedly examined the articles which the foresight of Miss Duranne had placed upon the horse. There was food and a blanket, but not even a knife.

This was rather discouraging, it is true; but as I was provided with food, and had a good, swift horse under me, I concluded to keep a southerly direction until I should strike the Oregon Trail, where I was tolerably certain of encountering some emigrant train. I kept up the gallop of my horse until broad daylight, when he forded a rapid stream of considerable size, upon the banks of which I allowed him to graze for an hour, while I made my morning meal.

The haunting fear of pursuit made me somewhat more severe with my horse than I should have been. But he was a noble animal, and when astride of him there was a most comfortable feeling of security.

We took little rest during the day. Sometimes when I reached an eminence I spent a few moments in looking back, but on no occasion did I catch sight of anything that looked like pursuers. At noon I discerned at a considerable distance a party of horsemen, who, I was pretty certain, were Indians, and I therefore gave them a wide berth.

The day was quite sultry, and early in the afternoon I saw that a severe storm was gathering. The sky rapidly became overcast with dark, sulphurous clouds, and the ominous booming of thunder in the distance, and the tremulous tongues of lightning that quivered in and out among the piles of cloud, warned me to lose little time in seeking shelter. Still I pressed on, unwilling to pause before it was necessary. When the large drops began to patter upon the ground I turned into a grove of trees, and securing my horse to a limb, I dismounted, and awaited the bursting of the storm.

For two hours the rain poured down, the lightning flashed, and the thunder raged like the fire of a thousand batteries. The darkness rapidly increased, and when the storm began to abate night was fairly upon me. I had wrapped my blanket around me, and under the thick branches had escaped with scarcely any moisture. Knowing that I should have to make a night of it, I sat down at the trunk of the tree with the intention of sleeping until morning. I might have secured, perhaps, enough of dry fuel to have kindled a fire, but I had learned too well the danger of doing that in this part of the country.

"There is one who can shield and protect you, and do not forget to call on Him." These parting words of Miss Duranne lingered constantly, and seemed to give a sort of restlessness that prevented sleep. When I had earnestly besought the protection of that great One, slumber visited my eyelids, and I became unconscious.

How surpassingly sweet the sleep of him who "wraps the drapery of his couch around him," and lies down with the consciousness that between him and his Maker all is well. How blissful the retrospect whose sunlight is not overshadowed by darkness! Though the humblest of mortals, our communion with God may be as close as the most gifted of his servants. The slave, toiling in his bonds; the prisoner, famishing in irons; the mariner, drifting helpless in mid ocean; the wanderer in the desert and trackless woods; the soldier breathing his last amid the wreck of battle; the beggar in his rags; the repentant criminal, the barbarian groping for light, lisping infancy, vigorous manhood, palsied age;—all, all creatures, have they not thine ear, O Father, and can any of their prayers ascend to thee in vain?

Ab, no; thy loving arms enfold us all, and only in thee can we rest secure. Then may thy smile rest upon us all, whether awaking, or in the sleep of nature, or the last long sleep whose awakening is in eternity.

The neighing and stamping of my horse aroused me. Recalling my situation, I sat perfectly still and listened. I supposed some wild animal was in the grove, and from

the tugging of my horse, I expected it to break loose each moment. I was debating with myself the propriety of ascending the tree behind me, when a flash of lightning illuminated the grove, and I saw, not a dozen feet distant, the form of a man, standing still, with a rifle slung over his shoulder, and in the attitude of attention.

Knowing that I must have been revealed, I stepped behind the tree. At the same moment a familiar voice exclaimed:

"If thar ain't Yorky, then my name isn't Tim Bufton!"

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH IS THE LAST.

"Where is Wadsworth?" was the first question I asked after saluting my friend.

"Bill got throwed—he's gone under."

"When? Not on the night I was captured?"

"Yes; I found him laid out cold and stiff next morning. I knowed it was all up with him afore the scrimmage was over."

"I rather expected you would follow me."

"Ef Bill hain't got wiped it we'd done it. But I was sartin if you hadn't had your ha'r raised already, you war just as well off as you could be. S'pose you're on your way to Californy?"

"Yes; I must press forward without delay. I can engage you to accompany me, can I not?"

"You done that long ago. In course I goes."

"I am really glad to come across you. I haven't so much as a gun or knife with me. How is it that I find you in this particular section?"

"I started for Fort Riley, and war well on my way, when I changed my mind and turned 'round to come after you. I seed you come into the grove, but I didn't know it was Yorky."

All this time we had been seated in intense darkness ; and as the lightning had entirely subsided, did not so much as obtain a glimpse of one another's faces. The wet condition of the grove prevented our starting a fire, had not my previous experience determined me against such proceedings. We conversed together for a long time, and then, as the night advanced, gathered our blankets around us and slept.

When morning dawned, the storm had entirely subsided, the sun was out, and everything looked cheerful and prosperous. I still had a considerable quantity of the food that my romantic friend had provided for me, and on this we made a good morning meal. Then mounting our animals, we rode out of the grove on a sweeping gallop, taking a southern direction, as before.

I mentioned to Bufton my fears of pursuit, and he added there was little doubt of my being followed. Near noon, we rode to the top of quite an eminence and looked back. I gazed long and searchingly, but could descry nothing, until the trapper directed me toward the very grove from which we had emerged some hours before. Here, by close attention, I made out a number of moving specks, just on the edge of the timber.

"Them's yer friends," said he; "jes' now they're takin' a look at your tracks."

"How far will they follow us?"

"Not much further. We're gettin' too near the emigrants fur them to think there's much chance of catchin' you. They'll keep along to-day, and the best thing we can do is to make some tall traveling."

Unquestionably this was good advice, and we acted upon it. Not until blank darkness did we draw rein, and then we led our foaming steeds in a grove similar to that in which we had spent the previous night.

The next day we struck the great Overland Trail to California and Oregon. Of course this is many miles in breadth, numbers of the emigrant parties being far out of sight of each other, when they are precisely the same distance from their destination. At night we saw the glim

mer of three camp-fires, and on the next day discerned the long trains of covered wagons winding around some rocky declivity, or creeping slowly along over the monotonous prairie. Patient indeed must be those travelers, plodding along at that snail's pace.

Our course now changed more toward the east, and I experienced the satisfaction of knowing that I was making good progress toward California. We had no difficulty in supplying our physical wants. The trapper's rifle was as unfailing as was the renowned Kit Carson's when hunter at Bent's Fort. Both our horses were noble animals, and we made good progress. Bufton's was somewhat smaller than mine, but he possessed an astonishing speed and bottom, and, I think, when fairly tested, would have endured more than my own.

We were now in a neighborhood where we constantly encountered emigrant trains. We sometimes passed five or six in the course of a day. The plains seemed literally alive with them. Nearly all with whom we stopped to converse complained of the aggressions of the Indians, and warned us against proceeding alone. Bufton did not fear to disregard their warnings, we camping alone as frequently as we did with any of these parties.

My captivity among the Indians had been of such duration that I had very little if any hope of taking up the trail of Herndon before reaching California. Occasionally I made inquiries, but gained not a particle of information.

Just as we approached the first hills of the Rocky Mountains, at the point where the pass enters them, two mounted hunters issued forth, and instantly recognized Bufton. They drew him off one side, and for a half hour conversed in a very earnest manner. They seemed to be urging him to do something, while he hesitated about complying. Finally he acquiesced and came back to me.

"Yorky," said he, "if it be possible, I've got to be in St. Louey inside of two weeks, or there'll be the biggest kind of a row. In course, if you ain't willin', I won't desert you; but I's goin' to say there's a company encamped about a mile up the pass, and they're bound to San

Francisco. If you could make arrangements to go with them, why, I'd be suited—and—I wouldn't ax you for any pay."

"This takes me very much by surprise, and before consenting to any such arrangement you must take me to where this party is, that I may see how I like their looks."

"That's right, and bear in mind, Yorky, I doesn't ax yer to do it if you feel agin it—just remember that."

The two hunters, instead of accompanying us, promised to await Bufton's return, and we rode away. As announced, we came upon a party of a dozen, seated around a fire, cooking, eating, smoking and enjoying themselves as best they could.

While yet a hundred yards distant, I heard my name called out, and immediately a young man, an old acquaintance of mine, stepped forth and greeted me. I was quite pleased with this, and additionally so to find several other friends among the adventurers. They had left home since I had, and the one referred to brought me news of my family. This was very gratifying, and I willingly released Bufton from my engagement. I took him aside, paid him the full one thousand dollars that had been agreed upon—he sturdily refusing at first, but finally yielding—and bid him good-bye.

"I hain't knowed yer a long time, Yorky," said he, with considerable feeling, "but I've knowed yer long 'nough to take a powerful leanin' toward yer, and you've walked tall into my feelins—"

He paused abruptly and took my hand—a cordial grasp—and he mounted his horse and rode away. I watched him until he disappeared behind a mass of overhanging rocks, and then turned away. I have never seen or heard of Tim Bufton since.

I was received very cordially by the party of young men. They knew I was not searching for gold—that is, directly—but was led to this place by a far different object than themselves. Still they forbore questioning me, pro-

bably knowing that it would have gained them no information.

It was growing dark, and it was decided to encamp in our present quarters for the night. The men had gained enough experience to learn the necessity of vigilant sentinels, and they stationed five in as many different quarters, while the rest of us lay down to slumber. The night passed away without disturbance.

Cheery and hopeful, we set out as soon as day broke, and commenced pressing our way through that vast wall that separates California from her sister States. It was toilsome and sometimes disheartening, but the air was pure and bracing, and we scarcely ever faltered. We had several shots fired at us from rocks so far above our heads that we barely heard the reports. Sometimes we would see a puff, then hear a sound like that of a distant driver's whip, and then the bullet would fall with a dull thud beside us, and could be picked up, only slightly flattened.

We all had great hopes of meeting a grizzly bear, but we were not gratified. One of my friends was sure he saw one several hundred feet above us; but, after discharging his rifle a dozen times or so without producing any sensible effect, he came to the conclusion that it was an inanimate object, and gave over the hope of being the first to "bag" one of these colossal kings of the western wilds.

Again and again we were in the regions of blinding sleet and snow, but we were well provided against all contingencies, and I do not think that any of the party ever felt for a moment that we were in danger. It is true we frequently talked of Colonel Fremont's disastrous expedition; but we reflected that, unlike them, we had the best season of the year, and unlike them also, (and it was just that that made all the difference in the world,) there was no fear of our losing the way. Finally, the great wall of mountains was scaled, and the journey proper was finished.

I had decided to go to San Francisco, knowing there would be letters awaiting me from home, as I had given

directions for the forwarding of drafts to me, and also for the reason that this would be the proper point to regain the trail of Herndon. As my companions had also concluded to procure their supplies and outfit at this place, we made the journey together; and on a fine day in latter summer we entered the city of the Golden Gate.

My first proceeding was to go the post-office, and here I found two letters awaiting me. One of these was a plump, jovial looking missive, bearing the pleasant handwriting of my wife, and containing a draft from Mr. Bonfield. As I opened it, several others fell out, and as I picked them up I recognized the handiwork of my youngest children. I looked at them enough to see that all were well, and everything was right at home, and then placed them away to enjoy fully at my leisure. The second envelope I saw was directed by Mr. Bonfield, the bank President. I opened it and read:

NEW YORK, June 20th, 18—.

MY DEAR FATHER — Yesterday, fifty-eight thousand four hundred and eighty dollars, being the exact amount extracted from our vaults some months since, reached me by express. Accompanying it was an anonymous note, in which the writer said he was only performing a duty, and that he trusted that now, as full reparation was made, all attempts to hunt him would be given over. There is another mystery in the matter which puzzles me painfully. I await your return to communicate my suspicion. If you can gain tidings of Herndon, do so; see him, if possible, and converse with him face to face, *but do not arrest him!*"

As I folded up the letter, I was provoked to think that Bonfield had not forwarded the note to me. While I strongly believed that Herndon was the writer, this bit of handwriting would have settled it beyond all question. "A matter of conscience," I concluded, as I left the office, and made my way to the hotel.

As soon as I was thoroughly refreshed from the fatigue

and suffering that I had undergone during the last few months, I began instituting inquiries regarding Herndon. These I made with great caution, and for a long time without success. Finally, in a most unexpected manner, I gained a slight clue, and leaving San Francisco, I journeyed toward Lower California, in the direction of a small town that had been settled a great number of years, and contained several hundred of the descendants of the ancient founders, and a great number of new comers.

I reached the town on Saturday night, and at once engaged quarters at a sort of fifth-rate hotel, undoubtedly the best in the place. It was crowded with drunken, fighting, uproarious miners, Mexican and half-breeds, whom I avoided as much as possible, and went to my room. Here I thoroughly secured myself, and at once fell asleep.

When I awoke, I was considerably surprised to hear the mellow tones of a church bell. Before entering the town, I had so thoroughly disguised myself that I doubt whether my wife would have recognized me had she met me face to face. After partaking of a morning meal that consisted entirely of fruit, I sauntered forth through the queer, ancient town. Unconsciously my steps led me in the direction of the church, and finding myself near the door, I entered.

I had supposed, as a matter of course, that it was Roman Catholic, but found at once I was mistaken. Taking a seat near the door, I raised my eyes to the preacher. The man occupying that pulpit, and engaged at that moment in preaching, was Herman H. Herndon.

There was the same fascinating countenance, the square shoulders, the fine Roman nose, the dark, curling hair, and ruddy, clean-shaven face, and the large, lustrous, expressive eyes. I fixed my gaze upon him, and saw that he glanced at me several times, but he had no suspicion of my identity. I listened to his sermon, (which, beyond question was an excellent one,) and when the congregation was dismissed, I wandered carelessly out of doors,

keeping my eyes fixed upon him, until I saw him enter a Spanish-looking residence near the edge of the town.

A half hour later I stepped upon the low covered porch and knocked. The summons was answered by a girl that stared wonderingly at me.

' Does the pastor of the church reside here?'

"Busca V. alguna cosa?" (Do you ask for anything?)'

"The pastor."

"Esta V. buscando algo?" (Whom are you looking for?)

I now changed to broken Spanish, and after a few words of parleying, she admitted me to a side-room, and departed to bring the man whom I was seeking. I was engaged in viewing some beautiful pictures, when I was startled by a footstep, and turning around, I saw Mr. Herndon. He still looked upon me as an entire stranger, even after I had spoke.

"This is Mr. Herndon, I believe?"

"The name that I am known by; I am glad to meet you. I think I observed you at church," he responded, grasping my hand most cordially.

"Pray be seated," he added. "I take you to be an American, and I am rejoiced to meet you."

"Mr. Herndon, I have something important to say to you. Can no ears overhear us?"

He looked sharply at me a moment, and then said:

"Perhaps you had better come to my room."

I followed him to an upper apartment, handsomely furnished, when, after seating me, he placed himself in an attitude of attention.

"Now, my dear sir, I am ready."

I leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

"I beg you not to start, as I intend no harm, but I have followed you step by step from the city of New York to this out-of-the-way place."

"For what?"

"For helping Evan Grimke to rob the Walsing Bank, New York."

In all my experience with crime and criminals, I never

saw a man so overcome as was Herman Herndon at this announcement. He turned as pale as death, and only by the strongest mental effort saved himself from fainting outright. He appeared for a moment as if swallowing something that kept rising in his throat, and finally faltered out :

“But that has been made right.”

“I know it; the whole amount of money has been received by Mr. Bonfield, and therefore I shall not arrest you.”

He was vastly relieved at this announcement, and seemed much more cheerful. After a moment's pause, he said :

“I did not commit that robbery, Mr. Pelham.”

“You assisted, however. Mr. Herndon, I give you my word of honor that I shall not disturb you. I leave this place to-morrow, and you can go or remain as you choose; but, in return for the leniency I show you, I ask a full and complete statement of your part in this business.”

He looked up in my face with a smile.

“Don't you remember George Bonfield?”

“I remember that the Walsing Bank President had such a son; but I have not seen him for nearly seven years.”

“I am that son.”

“Indeed; you have not displayed much filial affection by your conduct during that time.”

“I have done wrong, I admit, but hear my explanation.”

I signified that I was ready, and he proceeded :

“You never saw much of me, but I knew you, and had it not been for that curious disguise, I should have recognized you to-day in church. It will be ten years this autumn that I was sent to college. I remained until I graduated, intending to enter the ministry. I was so far advanced that it required but a short time for me to pass through college, and I immediately entered a theological seminary. I staid there until I had finished, and then

made a visit to a class-mate in St. Louis. While there I made the acquaintance of an old missionary to the Indians, and his daughter. I never was so charmed and delighted with a woman in my life. In short, I was desperately in love. I sought her society continually, and I believed she returned in some degree my admiration; but she was too true and sensible a lady to show any eagerness or unmaidenly haste. My profession was a good recommendation to the old missionary, and we became warm friends.

"The two remained for a couple of months in St. Louis, and when the father departed he left his daughter at school, where she had already spent a couple of years."

"His name, if you please."

"Duranne; hers was Eurenna. Why do you ask?"

"I have heard it before. Years ago it was mentioned in your family. Go on."

"Finally I gained her love, and went East to obtain the consent of my parents to the union. To my amazement, father opposed it most determinedly. He would not hear of my becoming married until I was fully settled, and then I was to take a *civilized* person, as he expressed it. I reasoned, but he was inexorable and considerably embittered. I returned to St. Louis, determined, if she was willing, to marry her at all events. But she was gone; for some reason or other her father had returned during my absence and taken her away.

"As he was stationed a long distance in the Northwest, and there were thousands of hostile savages intervening, I hardly dared to follow. I joined a party of hunters, however, with the hope of meeting or getting trace of her. These men, when fairly up among the mountains, were taken with the gold fever, and started for California. I joined them and went to the mines. Every one of us had extraordinary good fortune. In less than two weeks I had amassed a hundred thousand dollars, and many of the hunters were still richer than myself. All this time I passed under the name by which you addressed

me. Feeling satisfied with my wealth, I left the mines, went to San Francisco, and deposited it all with some bankers that had just organized.

"Drifting aimlessly about, I finally made my way to this town, where, feeling fully ashamed of the part I had acted in the past, I determined to go to work in earnest. There are many Roman Catholics here, but there are also a number of Protestants, and I took charge of this church; which has been vacant for a number of years. This has been my charge ever since."

"But your visit to New York?"

"All this time I have not been able to forget Miss Duranne—I still hold the belief that I shall meet her. So strong was this faith that I went to St. Louis last winter thinking it very likely that I should learn something regarding her. I heard nothing, and passed on to New York, intending to call on my parents and spend several months with them.

"I reached the city early in the evening, and was walking rapidly homeward, when, as I turned a corner, I was addressed by a rough-looking individual, who beckoned for me to follow him a short distance down a by-street. I hesitated at first, but he was so persistent that I obeyed. He lured me on until I entered a low, forbidding-looking house, when the door was instantly closed, and I was made a prisoner. This man knew me as Mr. Bonfield's son. He had probably known me years before and recognized me as I was passing. He had learned, too, by some means or other, of the estrangement between myself and parents, and it was this upon which he attempted to work.

"To be short, he revealed a plan for breaking into the bank that night, holding out strong inducements for me to join him. He used every persuasion at his command, all of which, of course, I rejected with the greatest scorn. Leaving me still a prisoner, he went out, and was gone a long time. When he returned he had a companion with him.

"It was now late at night, and I went forth between them. One of them held a loaded pistol, which, I have no doubt, he would have fired had I made the least outcry. The night was stormy, and they took me in such a circuit-

ous direction that we did not encounter a single person. I was forced into a building adjoining the bank, where I was compelled to descend into a tunnel, the other following, and the remaining one, I suppose, standing guard outside.

"I have been a prisoner among Indians, but I was never held so closely as I was upon that night. There was not the least chance of escape.

"When we emerged into the bank, I found that the safe had been already burst open. The man commanded me to hand him some of the money. I told him I would be killed before I would touch it. Thereupon he picked it up and announced the exact amount that he had prepared to carry away. The whole proceeding—this arranging everything and then returning with me—showed that a trap was laid for me, although why this should be done, it is impossible for me to conceive."

"The man perhaps bore an old grudge against you."

"Very likely; but while matters were in this shape, you burst into the room, and nearly frightened to death, I scrambled down the tunnel, and out into the open air, leaving the spot as rapidly as possible. I was so alarmed that I left for the West at once. The web by which I was surrounded, I felt would not permit of explanation or escape, and I therefore hurried away. Upon reaching San Francisco, I sent father the exact amount, stating that the matter would be explained in time. I never heard the name of the man who decoyed me aside that night, although I had given the one of Herman H. Herndon to him. His testimony would have condemned me at any time, and I therefore dare not testify against him. I made my way back to this spot, where I've just got fairly to work again."

"Do you intend to remain here for life?"

"I cannot say; I meant to write to father, giving him a full explanation, and asking his permission to return home again."

I sat in thought for a few moments, and then gave young Bonfield the part I had taken in the business. He was greatly excited when he learned definite tidings of

Elena Duranne, and begged me to accompany him at once on a visit to her. I advised him to go to San Francisco with me, where the matter could be arranged. Leaving a farewell for his people, he did so, when we departed the next morning, and reached the city in due time.

In San Francisco we engaged a party of hunters, and started at once for the solitude where I had left my kindred. I need not dwell upon the particulars of the journey. It was winter when we reached the place, and we had great difficulty in securing an audience with her; but we succeeded at last, and she and Bonfield met face to face. An explanation was made, and we all started East. In St. Louis the two were married, and the son sent home a complete history of his life for the past five or six years, and announced that he and his wife would soon be at home.

The hunters broke up in St. Louis, and I hurried homeward, leaving my young friends to make the journey at their leisure. On reaching New York, I made inquiries for Mr. Evan Grimke, but he had fled—gone to Europe, I think, as I have never seen him since. I found Mr. and Mrs. Bonfield anxious enough to see their children, and when they finally arrived, their joy cannot be described, while I felt a serene satisfaction in contemplating the part I had taken in unravelling this strange web of fate.

Strange, indeed, are the workings of Providence. Tangled though the web of our existence may be—dark the sky overhead—bitter the temptations that assail us—though our path seemingly may be lost in the labyrinth of doubt;—yet the night has its dawning, the sky its clearing, the shield of Right and Duty is impenetrable, and He who watches the fall of the sparrow, and takes note of our deeds and thoughts, who doeth all things well, will lead us, if we but permit, within his fold, to go out no more forever!

THE END.

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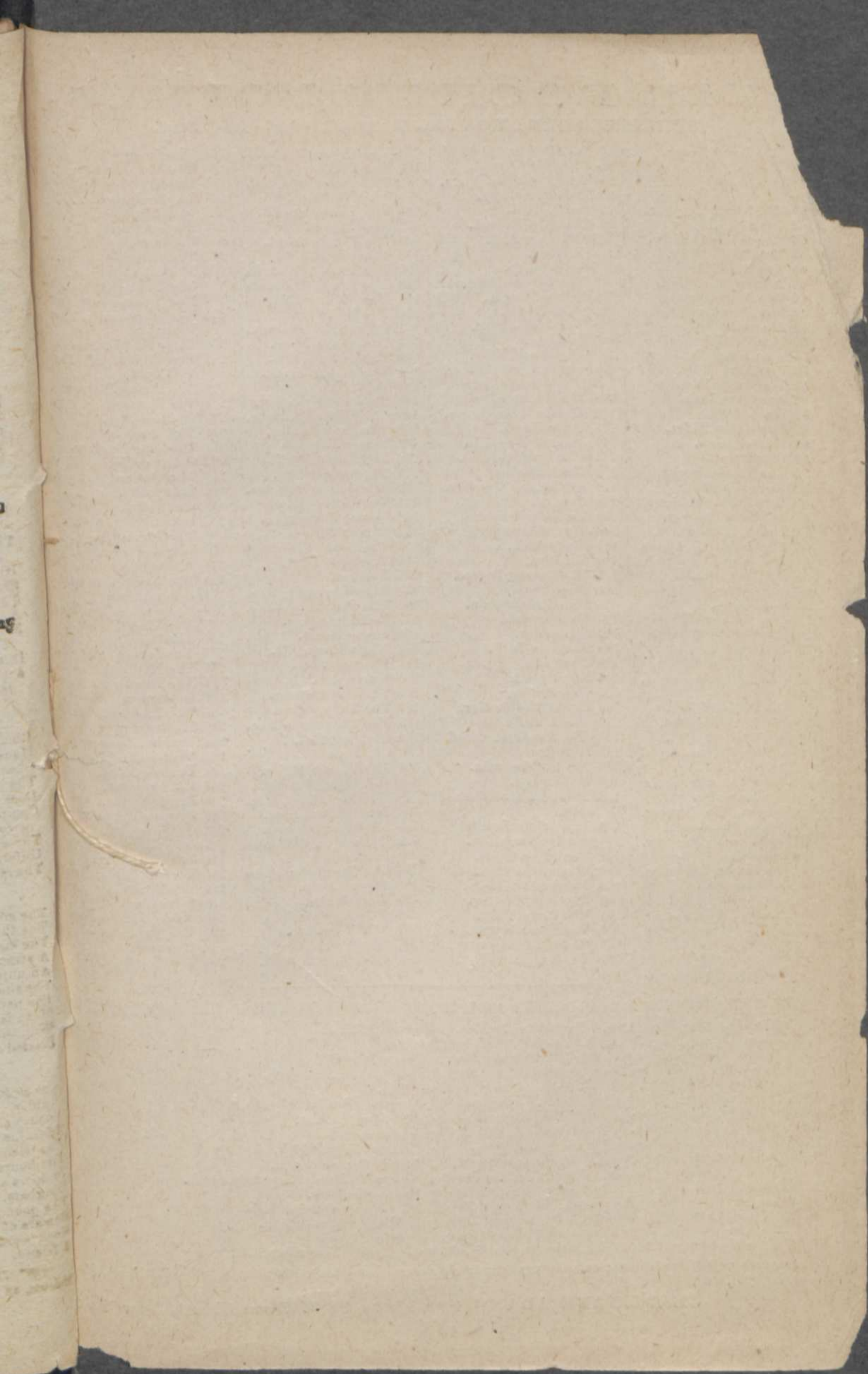
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